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RESIDENT EVIL 3

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A Big Thank You

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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Our long-time publisher, friend, and *Game Informer* family member Cathy Preston has retired. Her impact on *Game Informer* can't be measured. During her 20-year tenure as publisher, our subscriber base grew from hundreds of thousands to over eight million at its height. She believed in me, and believed in every member of our staff. I don't know where we'd be today without her support of our best (and even our worst) ideas.

Not only was she a great leader, Cathy inspired the culture here at *Game Informer* as well. Sure, she made decisions that were good for the business, but it was important to her that these decisions were also good for the employees. She cared about us, and respected the balance between our professional responsibilities and personal lives. Her dedication to this vision created a place to work unlike any other.

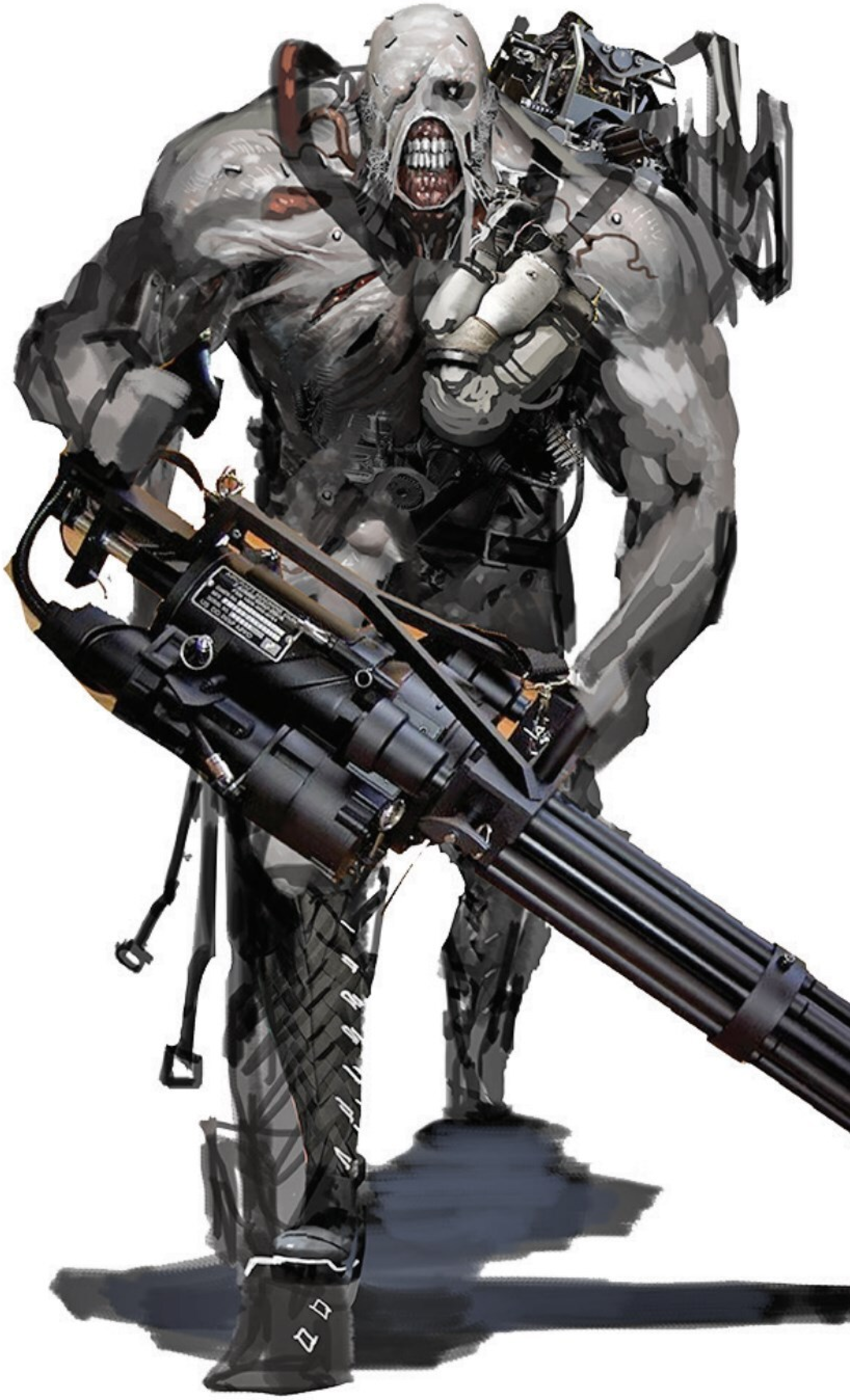
Yes, Cathy was my boss, but I can't thank her enough for being my friend. It has been an honor working with her, so from the team here at *Game Informer*: The scope of our gratitude is impossible to put into words.

Cathy's retirement comes as we restructure the business unit here at *Game Informer*. Unfortunately, that means we are also saying goodbye to many other great people who were a part of what makes this place so special.

At the core of this sad news is the fact that *Game Informer* will always be family. And we wouldn't have that experience without the support of our community and our friends in the game industry. So, thank you. This issue is a tribute to the one and only Cathy Preston – the magazine wouldn't still exist today without her.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,



26 Resident Evil 3 Remake

Just over a year after the release of the blockbuster Resident Evil 2, Capcom is set to release another epic reimagined survival-horror classic. We got an exclusive hands-on demo with Carlos, and talked to the team about why Nemesis is more terrifying than ever in this month's cover story. ***by Ben Reeves***

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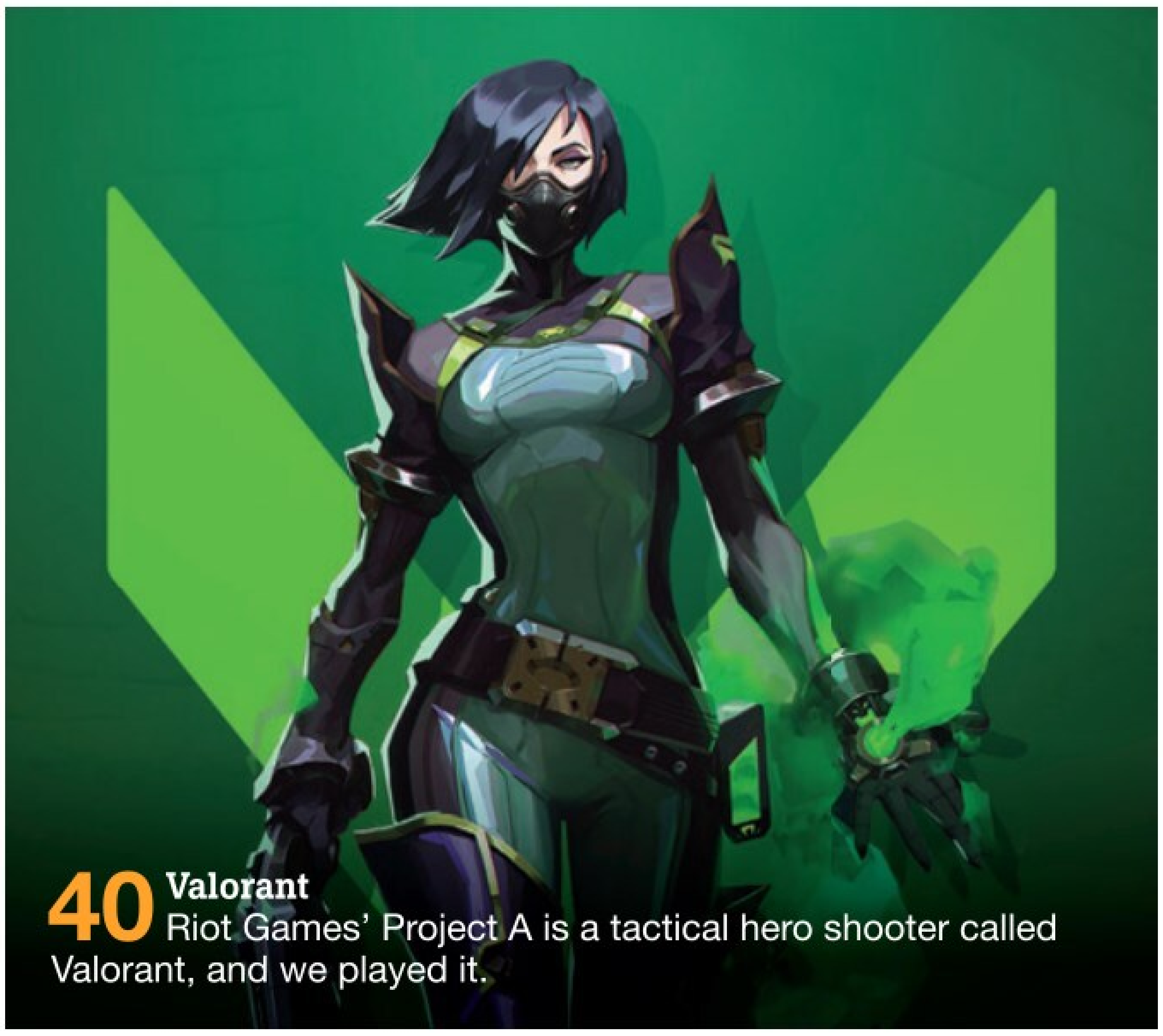

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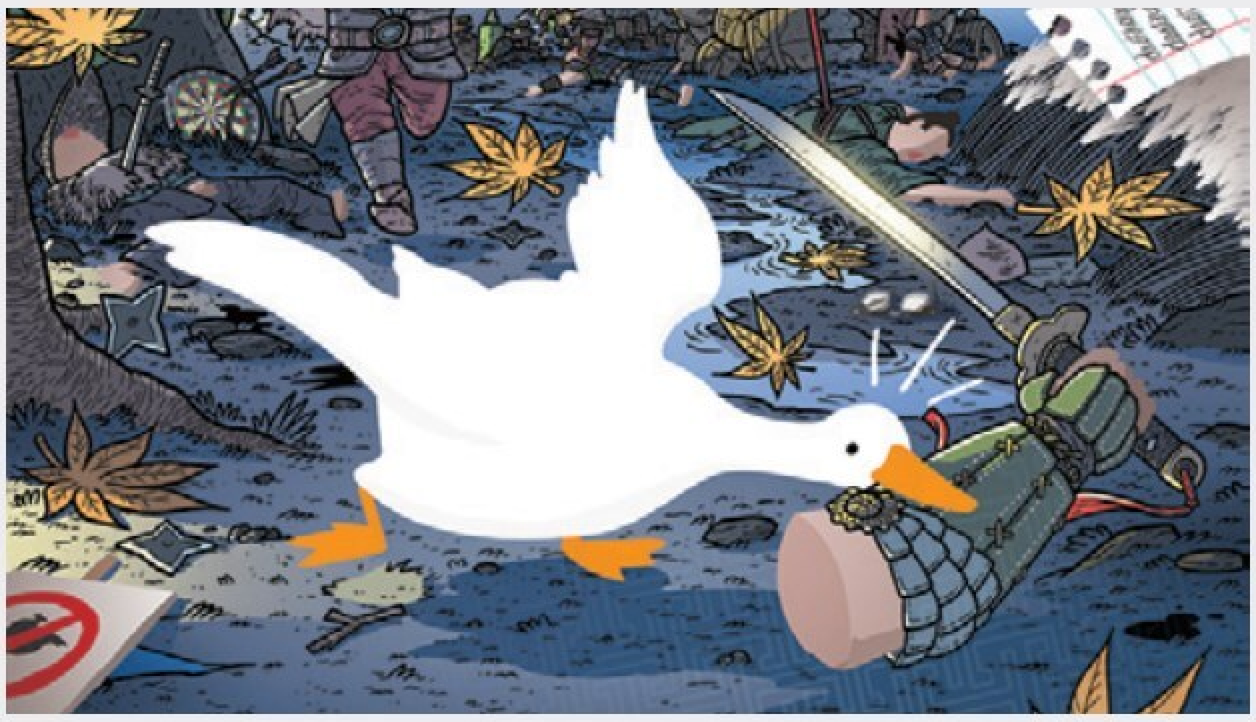

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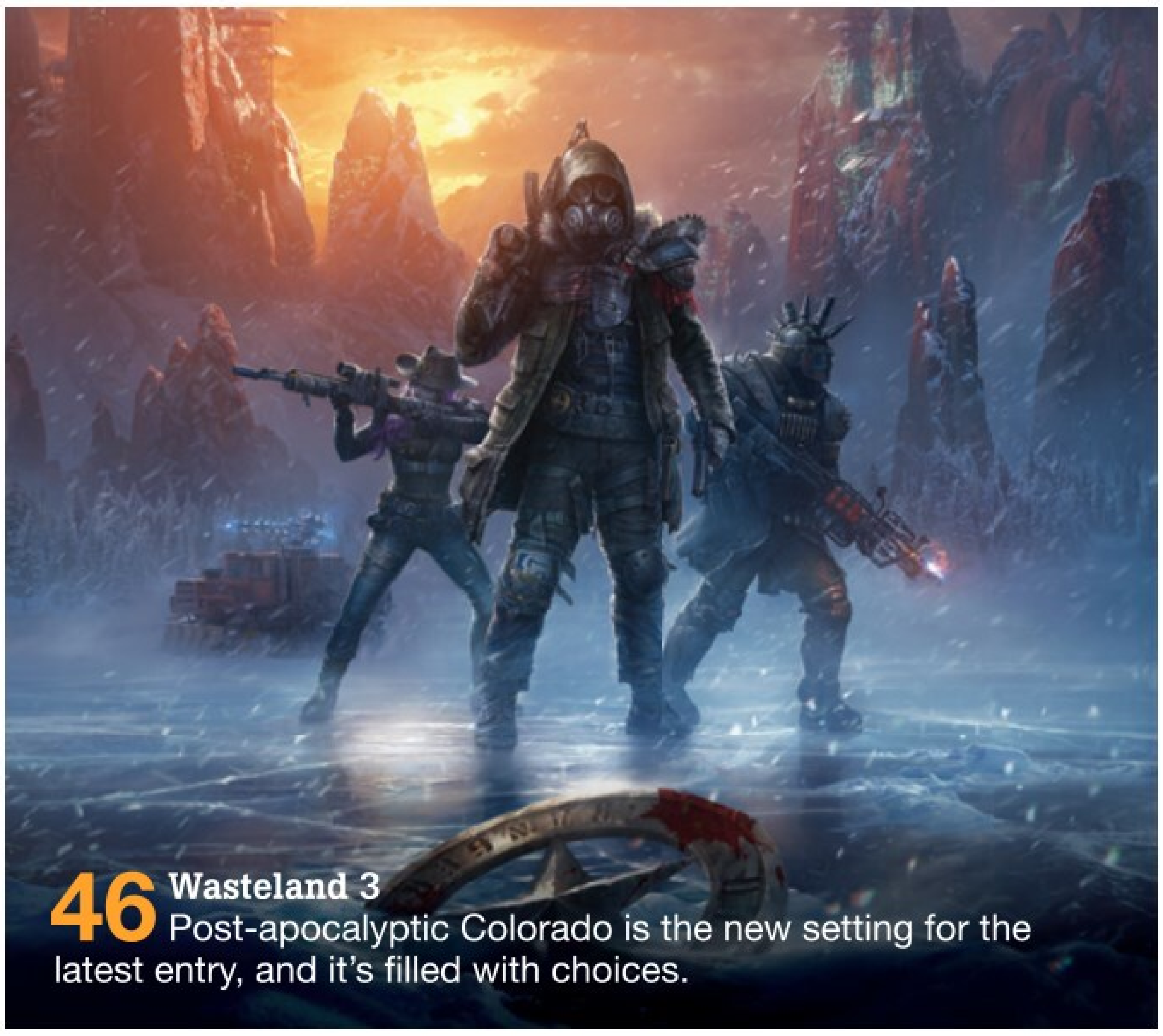

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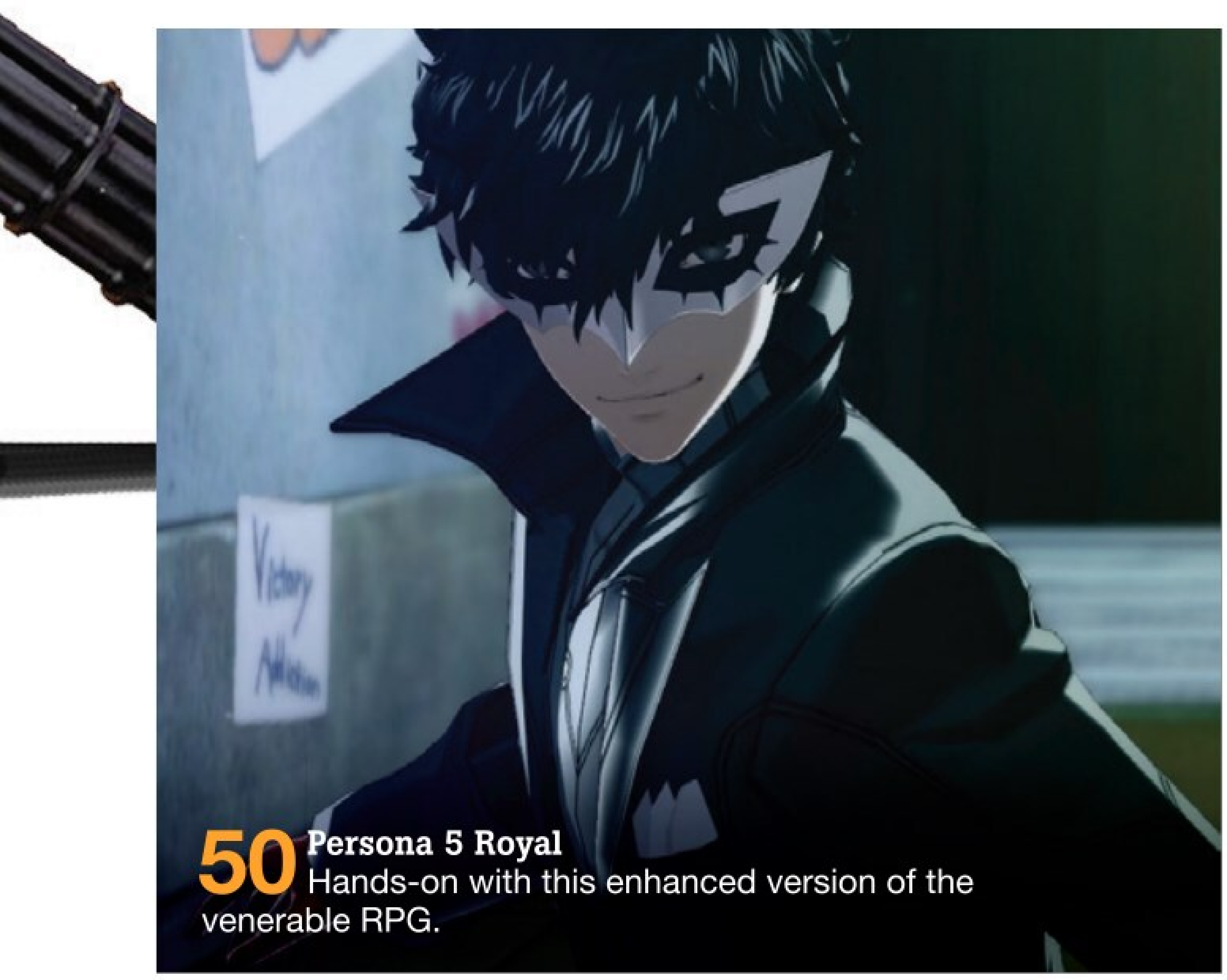

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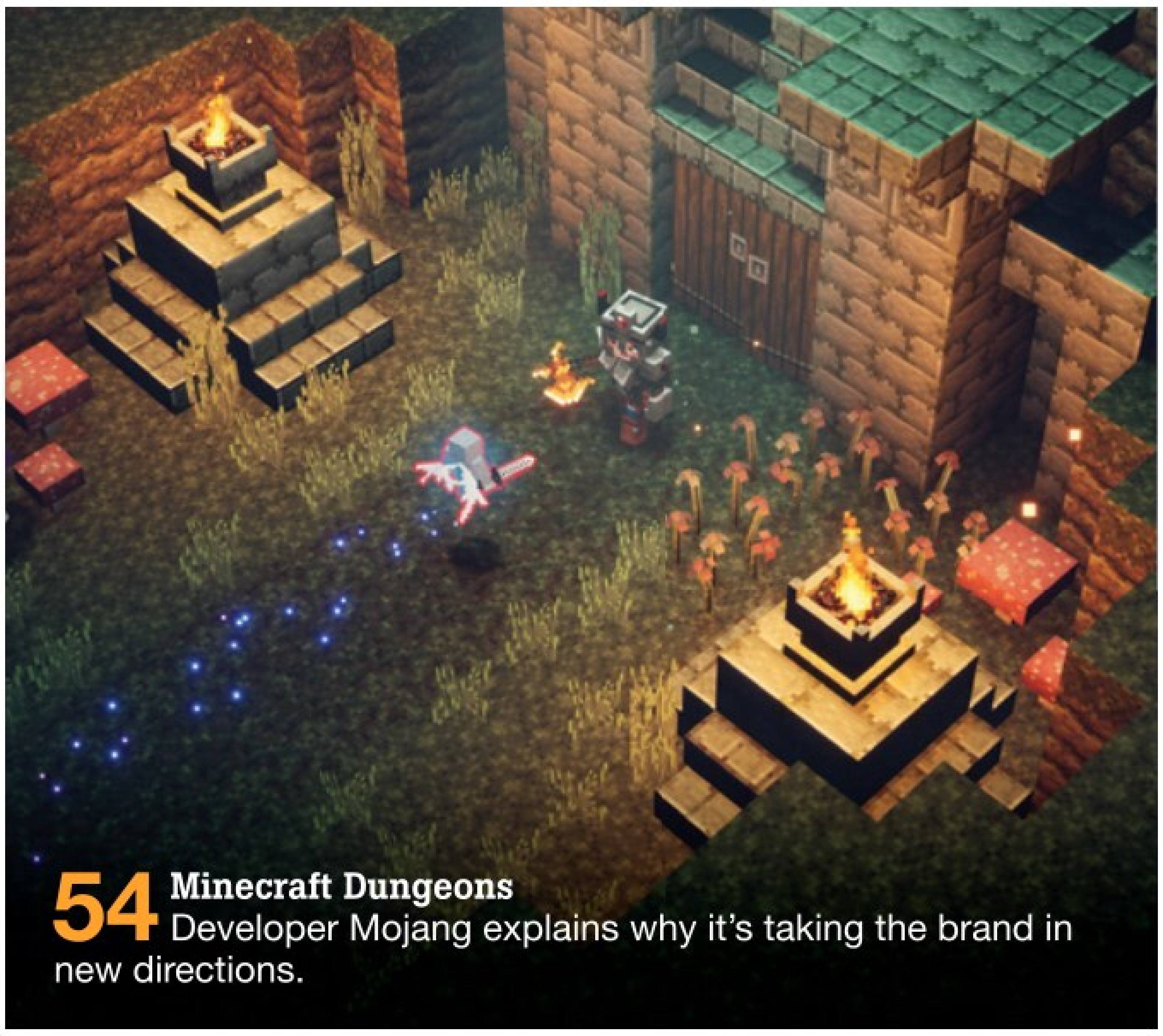
Hands-on with this enhanced version of the venerable RPG.



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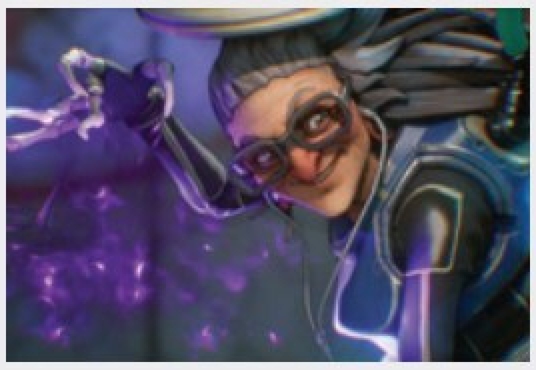

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Control what goes over the airwaves as a TV director, as well as the fate of the nation.

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Director Jesse Faden returns with a new story, new abilities, and more questions.

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The game is a one-of-a-kind mix of gory action, precision combos, and "The Weird West."

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Moon Studios' challenging platformer is better than the original and every bit as heartfelt.

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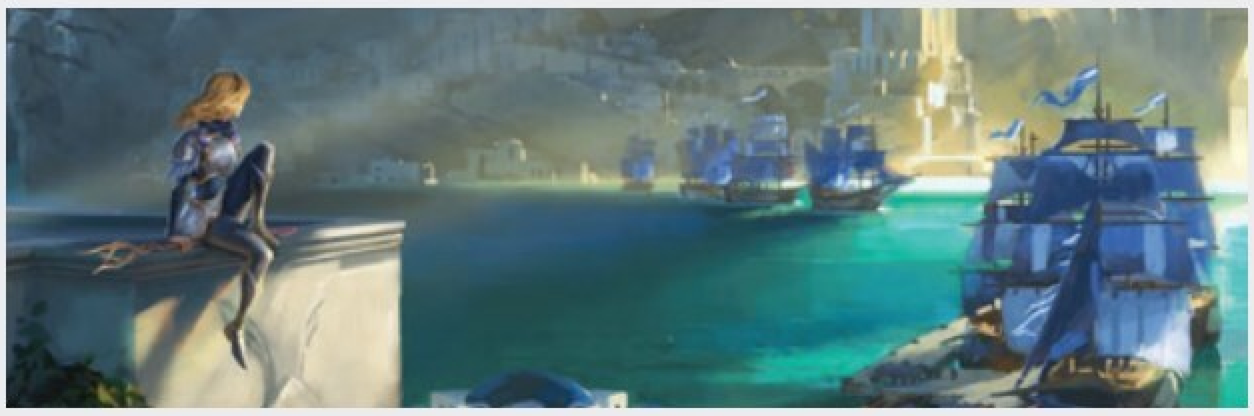

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Riot Games' debut free-to-play card game adds some enjoyable twists to the genre.

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SO **SMOOTH** IT WILL MAKE YOU FORGET ABOUT YOUR AWKWARD YEARS.

ALL 27 OF THEM.

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SQUARES
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SNICKERS
ALMOND BUTTER
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Our readers sing the praises of video game movies, are annoyed by mouse and keyboard play, and can't wait to play Outriders …

Loving The Outriders

Outriders sounds like the shooter I've been waiting for. As much as I love the visual aesthetic of Destiny, I didn't care for the story or enemies, and I also couldn't get into swapping weapons every 10 minutes in Borderlands. Anthem was … well … Anthem. Outriders looks wild. I love how they are combining powers with the weapon play.

Timothy Walker
Saratoga, CA

Just read your Outriders cover story, and while I think it sounds like a cool shooter with superheroes, I have to wonder why every publisher appears to be making online games like Destiny. Is that where the money is? I remember when World of Warcraft and Grand Theft Auto were the games every publisher was gunning for. Now it's this one, even after Activision waved goodbye to it. Do you have any insight into this, *Game Informer*?

Michelle Roolin
Cincinnati, OH

Square Enix has put a lot of focus on Final Fantasy VII Remake and Marvel's Avengers, but Outriders sounds like the company's most ambitious game. The character designs are awesome, and I love how deep the skill tree looks. Also, we can design our own vehicles. This sounds too good to be true. Is it?

Erik, The Eradicator
via email

People Can Fly is a development team with a respectable track record, and this is easily the studio's biggest game yet. We enjoyed what we played of it, and can't wait to see how it turns out when it launches later this year. Regarding every company wanting to make a game like Destiny, it isn't so much that blueprint (even though Outriders clearly draws inspiration from it), but the allure of keeping players entertained and in the same world for years. That's what publishers want to get out of their expensive "triple-A" releases.

BioShock 4

First off, just wanted to state, I love receiving my *Game Informer* magazines; when they arrive, I can't wait to dig in and see some new stuff and read stories. Therefore, I wanted to express just how excited and stoked I am to hear of BioShock 4! When I first heard of the news, I was like, "Yeah right, don't even play me like that ..." However, some BioShock news has been popping up on my Google news so I was beginning to think, 'Okay, maybe it is coming.' Well, when I just read issue #322, I came across the juiciest tidbit that confirmed BioShock 4. I immediately screamed and whooped and expressed my excitement! I CANNOT WAIT FOR IT!!! I'm so thankful for the people who joined together and created the BioShock series!

Kristen Edwards
via email

Contact Us

Send your questions, comments, and rants to feedback@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured in the magazine!

The big question is how will BioShock fare without creator Ken Levine at the helm? BioShock 2 was guided by a different creative team, which played it a little too safe in adhering to BioShock's blueprint. The beauty of BioShock and BioShock Infinite is they delivered the unexpected. We're hoping the newly formed development team at Cloud Chamber takes some chances with the next BioShock and gives us something we didn't see coming.

Video Game Movies Are No Longer Bad

Sonic the Hedgehog was so much fun! *Detective Pikachu* was as well! Is the curse of all video game movies being bad finally over? Can we expect a good Uncharted movie, and maybe even a great The Legend of Zelda film in our future?

Clarence Wyatt
Madison, WI

We like the roll video game movies are on, but if you really take a microscope to *Sonic the Hedgehog*, how closely did it actually follow the games? While that movie had some clever tie-ins to Sonic's game lore and pop-culture influences, any critter could have filled his shoes. It was a fun buddy cop movie with Sonic's boisterous personality at the center. We all want to see games treated with the same care as *Lord of the Rings* on the silver screen, but filmmakers always seem to take them in different directions rather than adhering to the source material. Sonic worked. Most games don't when they are turned into something else. That's been one of the big problems. The *Uncharted* film just lost its sixth director earlier this year, but will hopefully find the right lead to do the game series justice.

Controller Vs. Mouse And Keyboard

Thank you for allowing me a moment to vent. In Call of Duty: Modern Warfare, a lot of players are using keyboard and mouse in "CONSOLE ONLY" games. You can tell on the kill cam replay from the movements, complex maneuvers, and uncannily accurate shots. I'm an older, longtime gamer, playing games since Atari (I have been playing FPS games since Castle Wolfenstein, so I know how to play). These keyboard/mouse players have a decided advantage during online play, which I can only equate to the advantage that an athlete using steroids holds in a sporting event.

Thanks for the soapbox.

"BabyGunz"
via email

The interesting thing about Modern Warfare is that most pros (including those in Call of Duty League) use controllers. Yes, a mouse and keyboard allow for pinpoint precision at high speeds, but the assist you get with a controller is hard to deny. We agree, however, that it would be nice to enter matches where everyone is using a controller. Make it an even playing field. Where do you draw the line, however? Does it have to be a standard controller, or are options like pro controllers allowed?

Short Answers To Readers' Burning Questions:

Will there ever be a Persona 3 remake? That game is awesome, and they should totally do a remake!

It seems like every game is getting a remake these days so we'd like to think there's a good chance of it. We dig that game, too! How about a box that collects all of the Persona games? We'd pay big money for that.

Mario or Luigi?

Can we say "both"? If not, we have to go with Mario. He's still the face of Nintendo. We doubt "Mario Brothers" will become "Luigi Brothers" any time soon.

Is Pokémon Go the best Pokémon game?

We still prefer the main entries like Sword and Shield, but Niantic has turned Go around and made it into something we play every day. Is it the most profitable Pokémon game? Yes.

Best Comment:

"You guys can shove that scoring scale of yours where the sun don't shine. Warcraft III: Reforged deserves a 6. Not a 9.5" [We gave it a 6]

Question Of The Month:

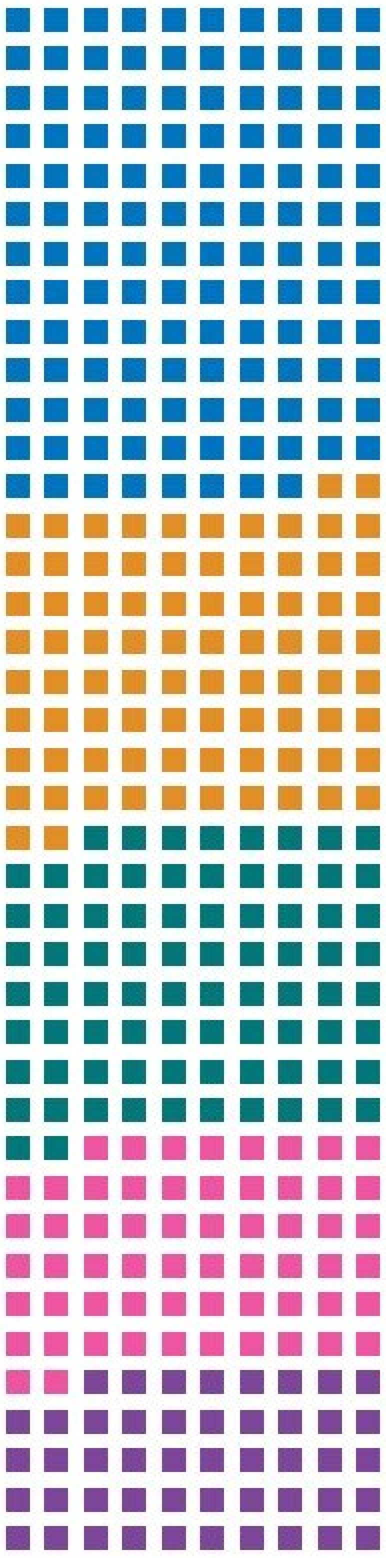
If you had to pick one, do you go with a PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X, or Switch?

gi spy

(Left) Brian hangs with the voice cast of Persona 5 Royal. **(Right)** While in Los Angeles, Brian caught up with Michele Morrow, Hearthstone voice actor and co-creator of YouTube Red's Good Game

PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

On Your Mind



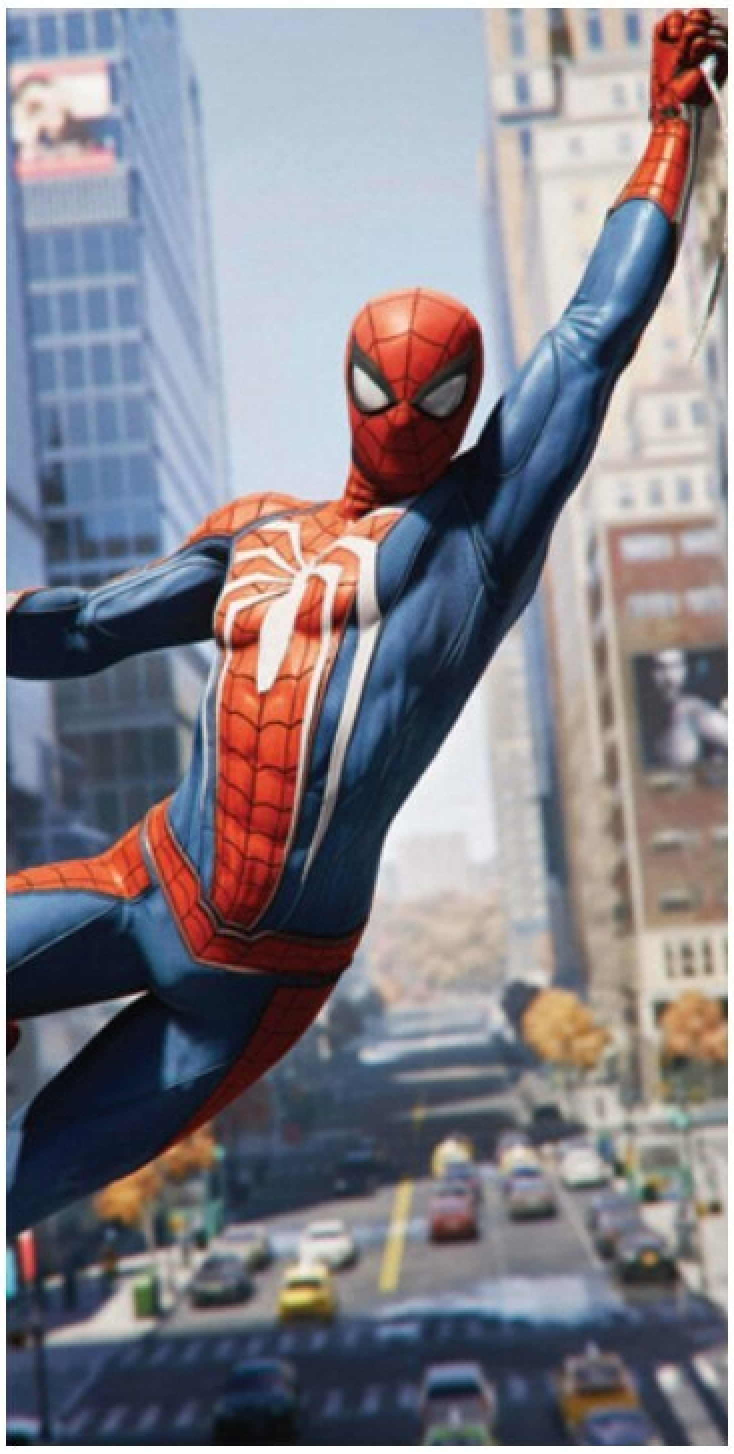
- 🟦 Are eager to return to Final Fantasy VII
- 🟧 Play Fortnite
- 🟩 Are hesitant to buy a PS4 or Xbox One
- 🟥 Still hate microtransactions
- 🟪 Hope PlayStation 5 plays UHD discs

Spider-Man In Avengers

Is there any chance that Spider-Man will be a playable character in the upcoming Avengers game? If so, could he be wearing the suit that Insomniac Games created for its Spider-Man game? That would be the best thing ever.

Reese Andersen
Sitka, AK

Spider-Man has to be one of the top characters developer Crystal Dynamics wants to include in the game – how could he not be? If one of his alternate suits was the one created by Insomniac Games, it would likely be a PlayStation exclusive, as Spider-Man was published by Sony. We could definitely see it happening, but also could see Crystal Dynamics picking one of the other many webswingers like Spider-Gwen or Miles Morales.



More Perspectives On Delays

Last month we asked our readers for their thoughts on game delays following Final Fantasy VII Remake, Cyberpunk 2077, and Dying Light 2 getting pushed to later dates. Here's what they had to say …

Confucius says people should be more understanding of game delays. No one wants a repeat of Anthem, so give the developers the time they need and get off their backs about it. Gamers complain when a game gets delayed, but if the developers released it when they said knowing it had bugs and wasn't up to standards, gamers would still flip out and say, "Why would you release this crap?" Cut them some slack, why don't ya.

JFord312
via email

For me, game delays are simply part of the process of development. I'm a little disappointed when it happens to a game I preordered, but it's nothing to be upset about. A developer needs more time to make sure their product is suitable for release. I'm ok with that. I tend to get really irritated at my fellow gamers when they complain about delays. Be glad the game didn't get canceled, have some patience, and go play something else to tide you over!

AJ
via email

No one likes game delays, but it is preferable to a mess of a game and the developers trying to rush patches. First impressions last a lifetime.

Craig Dodds
via email

(Left) Leo and his Rainbow Six Siege friends check out the Invitational. **(Right)** Team members from We're Five Games (developers of Totally Reliable Delivery Service) do a little heavy lifting. They're Minneapolis-based!

WINNER

1 Jeremy L. Butti

Rapture is a world of moral ambiguity, so this shades-of-gray rendition of its most iconic residents is entirely appropriate.

2 Mikyla Johnson

No visit to Rain World is complete without cowering from the terrifying local wildlife.

3 Maria D.

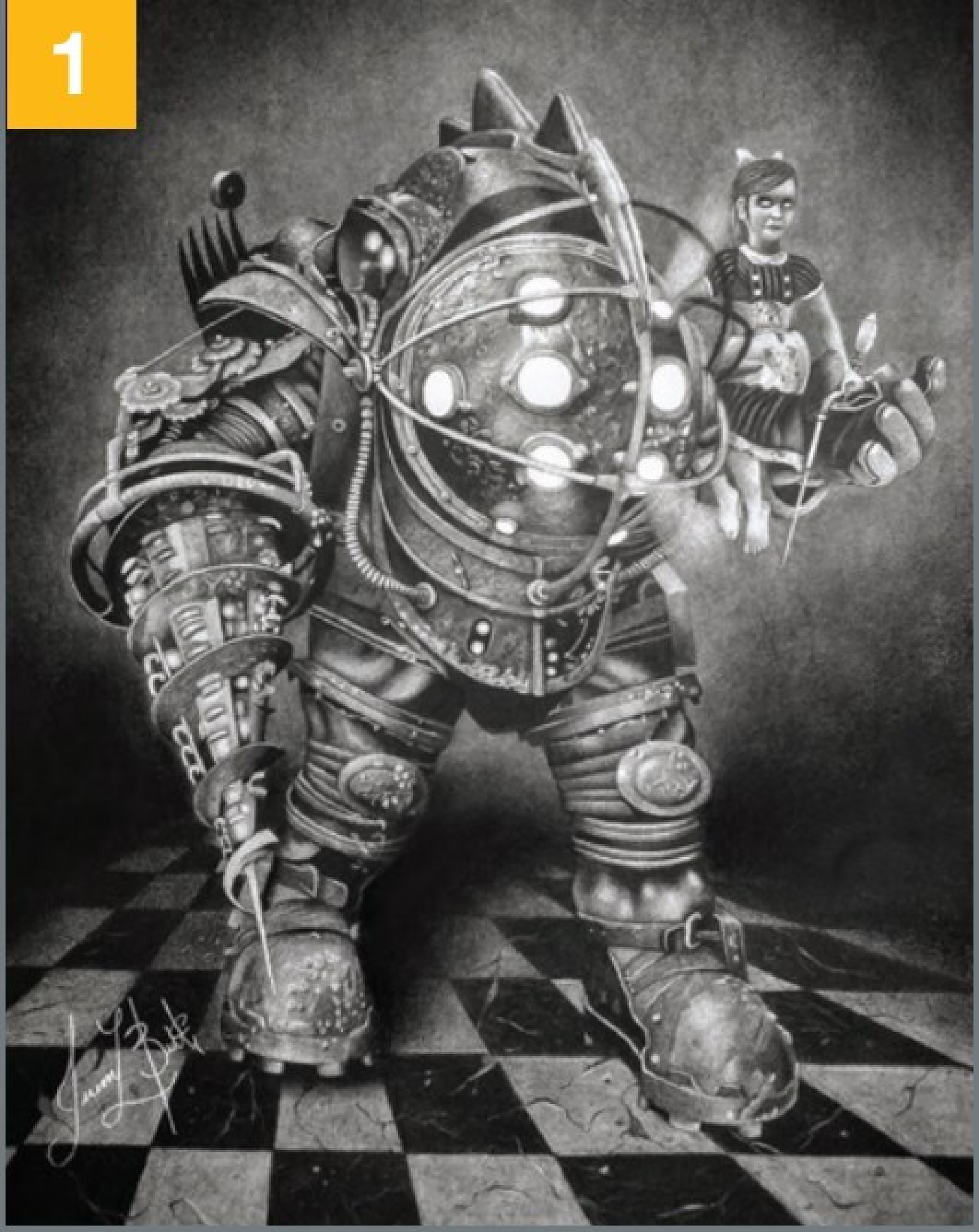
The goose's actions may be horrible, but this posable 2D art sure isn't.

4 Joshua Mann

The Yoshi Wars taught us all what happens when you push a seemingly peaceful species too far.

5 Levi Myers

This epic video game crossover will only ever exist in our imaginations.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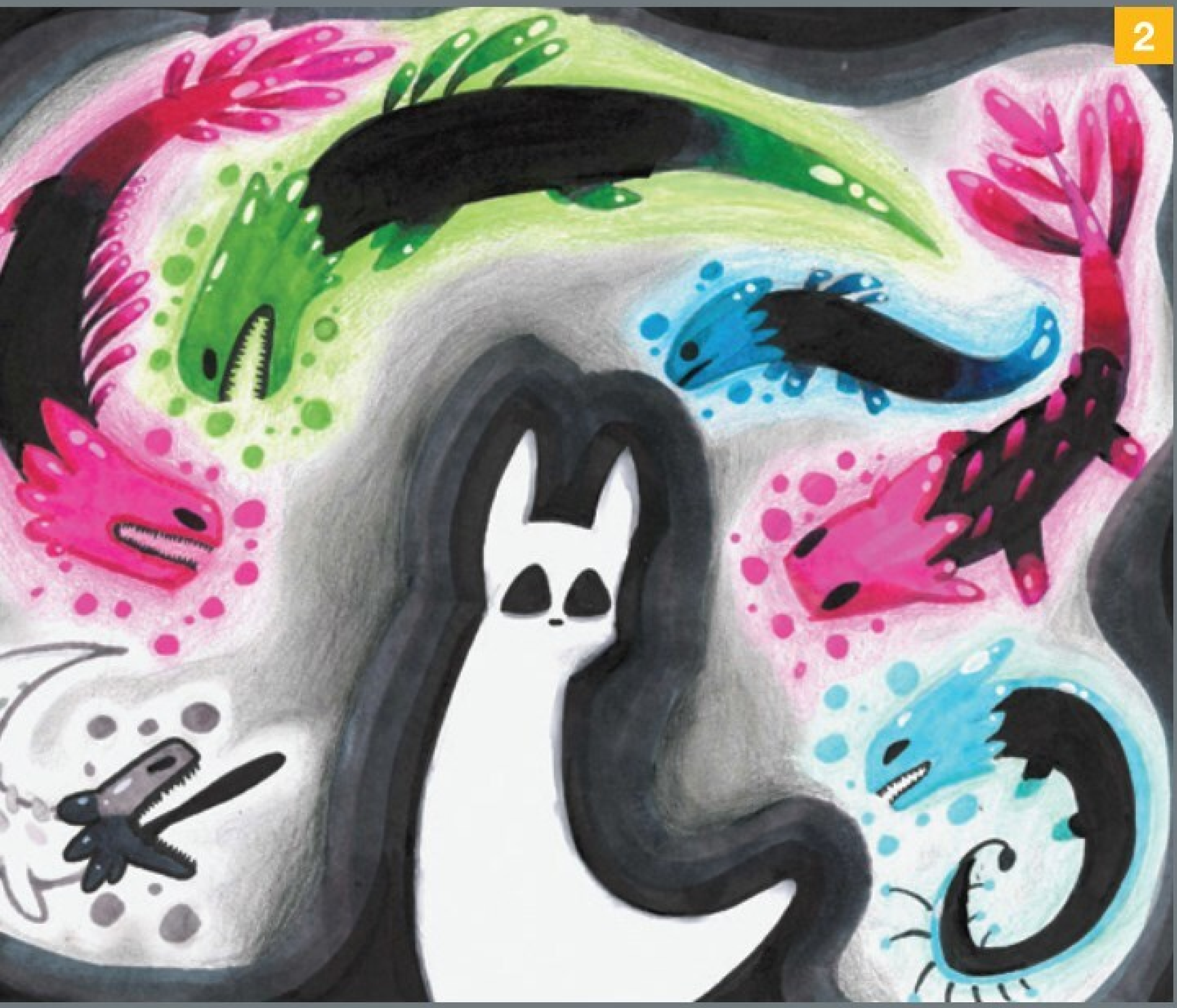
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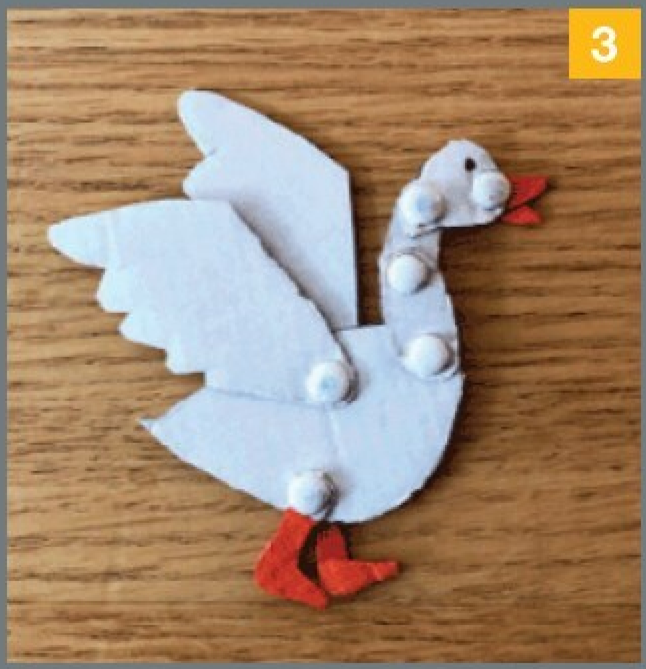
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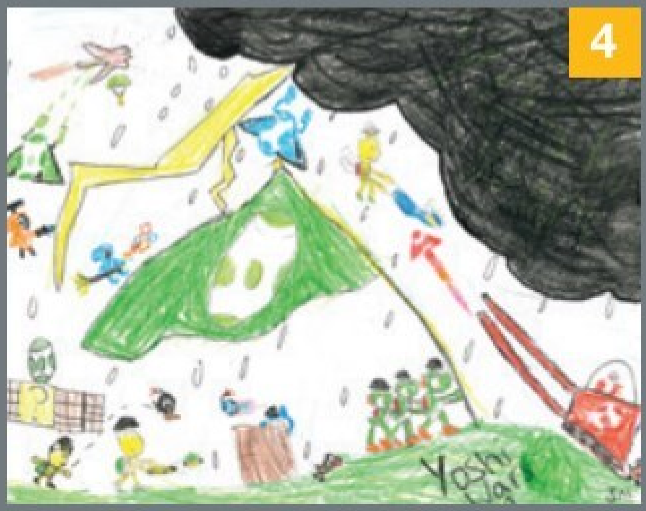
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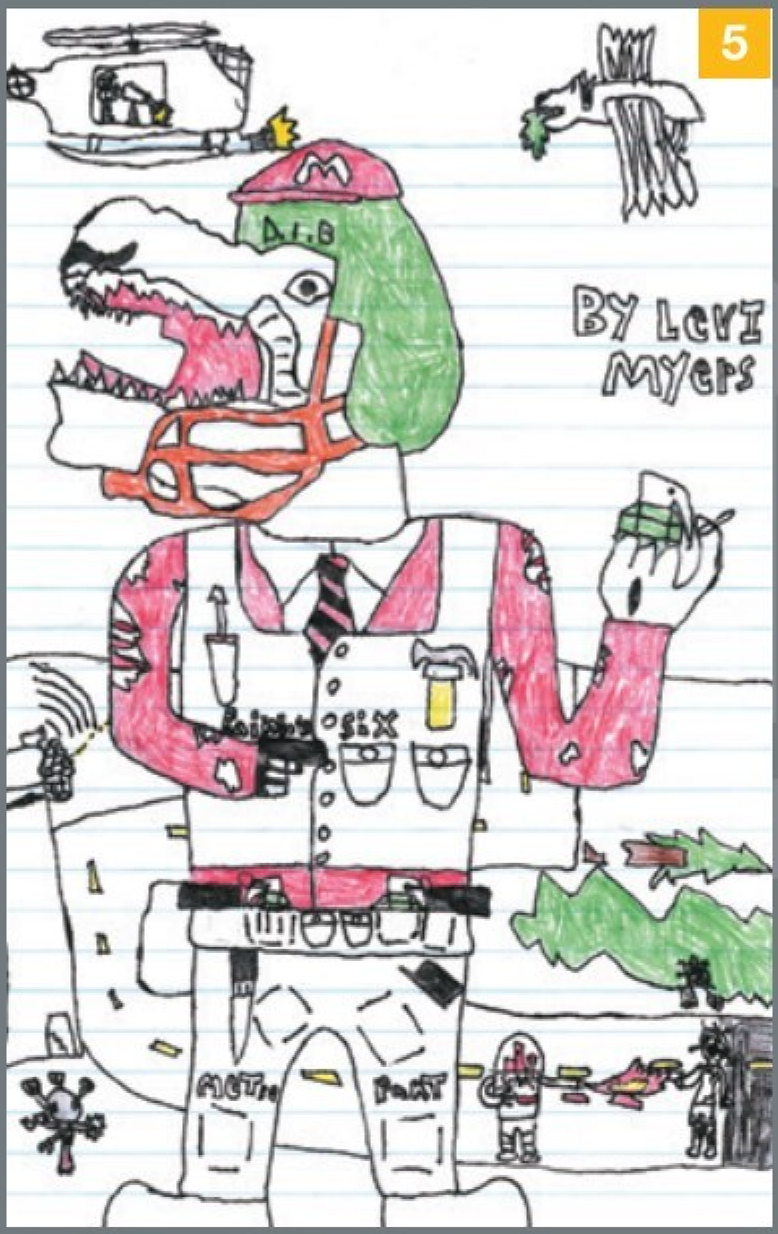
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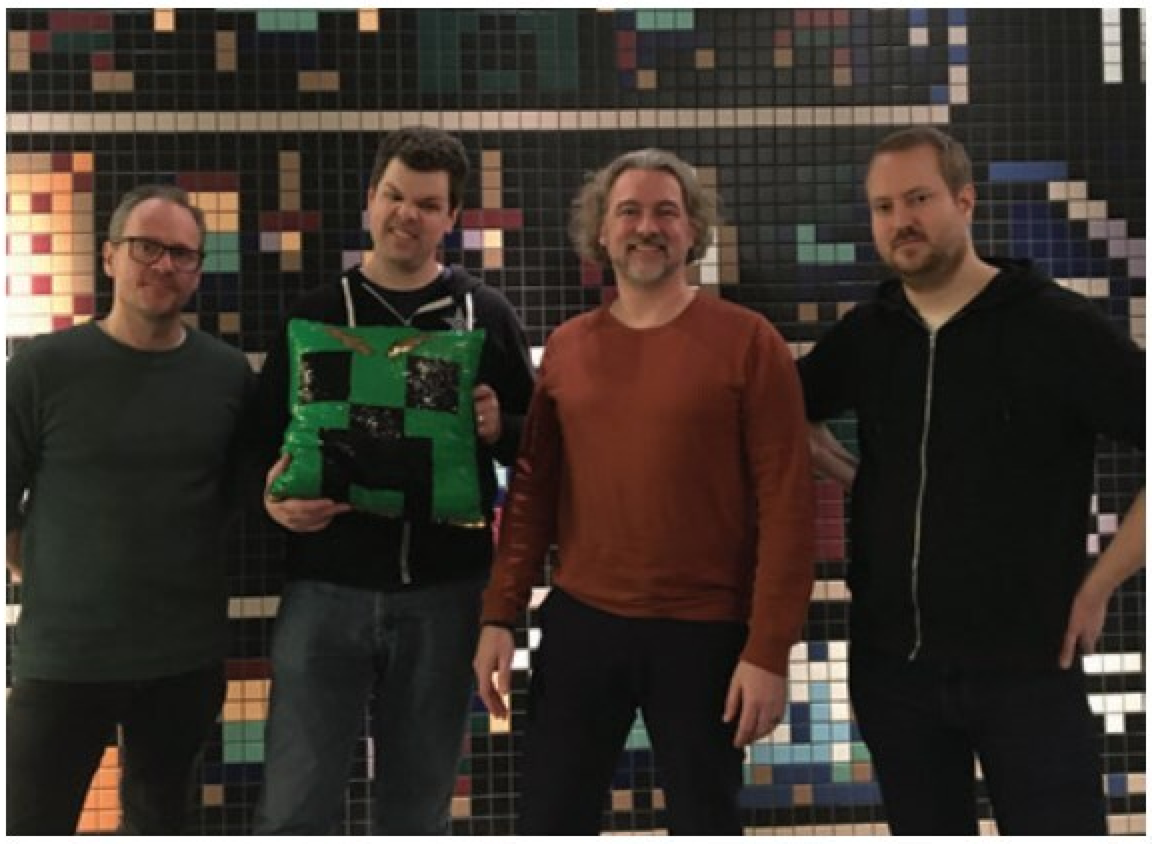


(Left) Ben makes his angry creeper face (otherwise known as his face) with Mojang's Daniel Bjorkefors, David Nisshagen, and Måns Olson for our coverage of Minecraft Dungeons. **(Right)** What's the scariest food? Pizza. At least, that's what Resident Evil's Ted Tsung and Angella Austin told Alex and Ben.

MICROSOFT OPENS UP ON NEW XBOX SERIES X FEATURES

by Matthew Kato

Backwards compatibility, quick-resume, and more discussed

Microsoft is slowly unveiling details about the Xbox Series X ahead of its release in the back end of this year, and the latest info further quantifies the home system's power and capabilities, as well as software plans.

In a blog post, Phil Spencer, head of Xbox, said that Series X's custom AMD processor is four times more powerful than the regular Xbox One, with the AMD GPU (graphics processing unit) in particular having 12 TFLOPS at its disposal. Spencer classifies the GPU as twice as powerful as the Xbox One X and eight times greater than the original Xbox One, and capable of creating "higher framerates [and] larger, more sophisticated game worlds…"

Previously, Microsoft has touted the Series X's variable-rate shading to stabilize framerates with higher resolution, ray tracing for realistic lighting and acoustics, a solid-state drive to improve loading, decreased input latency, and more.

The Series X supports HDMI 2.1, which allows for the lowest latency and smoothest visuals on your display. HDMI 2.1 ports on TVs are not widespread yet, and they will be necessary for your TV to depict the high-end resolutions and framerates the Series X is capable of, such as 4K/120 fps, because of HDMI 2.1's higher bandwidth.

One new feature includes quick-resume – the console's ability to suspend multiple titles at once so you can pick up playing them right where you left off. At the time of this writing,

Halo Infinite

Officially Announced Xbox Series X Games So Far

Not including the library of backwards-compatible titles, here is the current list of the upcoming games for the Xbox Series X. All of these titles will also be available for the Xbox One.

- **Halo Infinite** (343 Industries/Microsoft Studios)
- **Cyberpunk 2077** (CD Projekt Red)
- **Outriders** (People Can Fly/Square Enix)
- **Senua's Saga: Hellblade II** (Ninja Theory/Microsoft Studios)
- **Watch Dogs: Legion** (Ubisoft Toronto)
- **Gods and Monsters** (Ubisoft Quebec)
- **Rainbow Six: Quarantine** (Ubisoft Montreal)
- **Rainbow Six Siege** (Ubisoft Montreal)
- **Unannounced Title** (Ubisoft)
- **Battlefield 6** (Electronic Arts/EA DICE)
- **The Lord of the Rings: Gollum** (Daedalic Entertainment)

XBOX
SERIES X
HOLIDAY 2020

Microsoft has not clarified exactly how many games can be simultaneously paused through this feature.

The quick-resume feature is sure to get plenty of use as Microsoft is making a commitment to provide the Xbox Series X with a large library of games. All existing Xbox One titles – including already-compatible Xbox 360 and original Xbox titles – work on the Series X, and the Game Pass subscription will deliver first-party games when they launch.

First-party titles will also make use of "smart delivery," which is technology that automatically runs the appropriate version of a game based on your hardware. For example, you can play Halo Infinite on your Xbox One, but if you play it on Series X, the smart-delivery feature ensures that you are getting all of the available performance enhancements. Plus, a single purchase gives you access to the game on both consoles.

CD Projekt's much-anticipated Cyberpunk 2077 is also utilizing smart delivery, giving the game further exposure on two systems and bolstering the Series X's game library.

The console will also be aided by Microsoft's continued support of existing initiatives such as Project xCloud (game streaming), Xbox Play Anywhere (which gives players PC versions of Xbox games they purchase), and cross-platform play.

As much as the Series X is coming into focus, consumers still have a range of questions about the console, including its cost, hard-drive size, additional first-party software contributions, and whether the rumors of a scaled-back "Series S" or additional versions are true. Moreover, we still don't know exactly how the Series X stacks up against the PlayStation 5, since (as of this printing) details for Sony's next-gen hardware are still trickling out. The PS5 is also launching this holiday season.

The latest details about the Xbox Series X aren't comprehensive, but at a minimum they reiterate Microsoft's previous commitment to services, backwards compatibility, and positioning the Series X on the vanguard of home consoles. As the system's release approaches, defining the remaining details will be key in getting gamers invested in jumping into this next generation and separating the Series X from the competition. ◆

A GATHERING XCLOUD

We take the temperature of Microsoft's streaming service

Microsoft's Xbox Series X console is generating big buzz, but the company's upcoming streaming service could be another key factor in how we play games in the near future. Microsoft teased its entry into online game streaming at E3 2018, and since then Project xCloud has rolled out in a public preview program for select players. We put the service through its paces to determine if it has value in a year filled with exciting new consoles. ***by Ben Reeves***

WHY IT'S PROMISING

From a consumer perspective, Project xCloud is an exciting proposition. Instead of buying expensive new hardware, users tap into Microsoft's Azure cloud-computing centers and play many of their favorite games, free of downloads or other updates that plague modern gaming. The service is currently testing on Android-based mobile devices but will expand to iOS and PCs later this year. Digital touch controls are available for mobile, but players can also sync a wireless Bluetooth controller. To date, Microsoft has rolled out over 50 games on the service, including hits like Gears 5, Forza Horizon 4, and Destiny 2, and later this year, the publisher plans to link xCloud to its Xbox Game Pass, which contains a library of over 200 titles.

HOW IT WORKS NOW

I spent several hours with xCloud using a Google Pixel 5 and a wireless Xbox One controller. Much like Google's Stadia service, xCloud works surprisingly well. The games I tested looked bright and crisp, and load times were measurably faster thanks to the added horsepower of Microsoft's servers. Microsoft's service even grabbed a cloud save for Halo: The Master Chief Collection that I'd forgotten about, so I was able to continue playing old games without starting over.

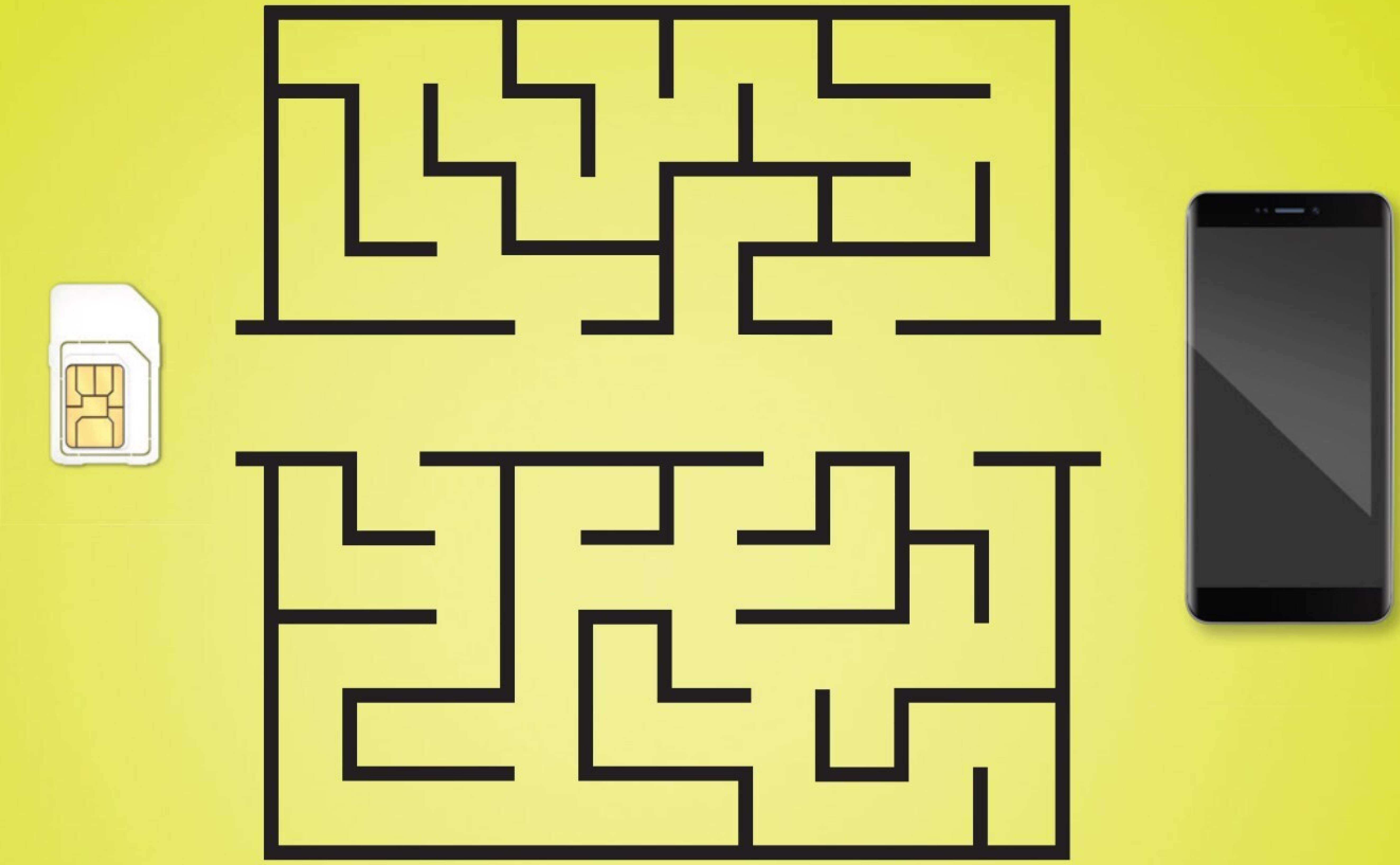
The wi-fi in *Game Informer*'s office sat around 120 Mbps while I was testing, so I always had a clear HD quality picture. However, when I took my phone outside and speeds dipped to around 15 Mbps, the visual quality diminished. I never had a game drop entirely.

One of the biggest sticking points for streaming services is latency, because button inputs always take longer to travel to a server across the country than a console next to your TV. The latency I experienced using xCloud was slight but noticeable. I quickly adjusted and forgot about this lag while playing titles like Civilization VI and Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice, but the latency was more noticeable in games with tighter controls, such as Ori and the Blind Forest. Fortunately, none of the games I tested felt unplayable.

THE BIG UNKNOWNS

A number of unknowns still surround Microsoft's xCloud. We don't know when Microsoft will officially roll out the service to a wide audience, how it plans to monetize the technology, or how many games will ultimately be available for streaming. As we move closer to the next generation of consoles, we expect to hear a lot more, but our early impressions with xCloud left us excited.

Playing games locally will likely offer a slightly smoother experience for several years to come, but xCloud could offer players the ability to play the best versions of high-profile titles like Cyberpunk 2077 and Halo Infinite without the need to upgrade their home tech. This could be xCloud's biggest selling point and reason enough for players to keep Microsoft's streaming service on their radar.



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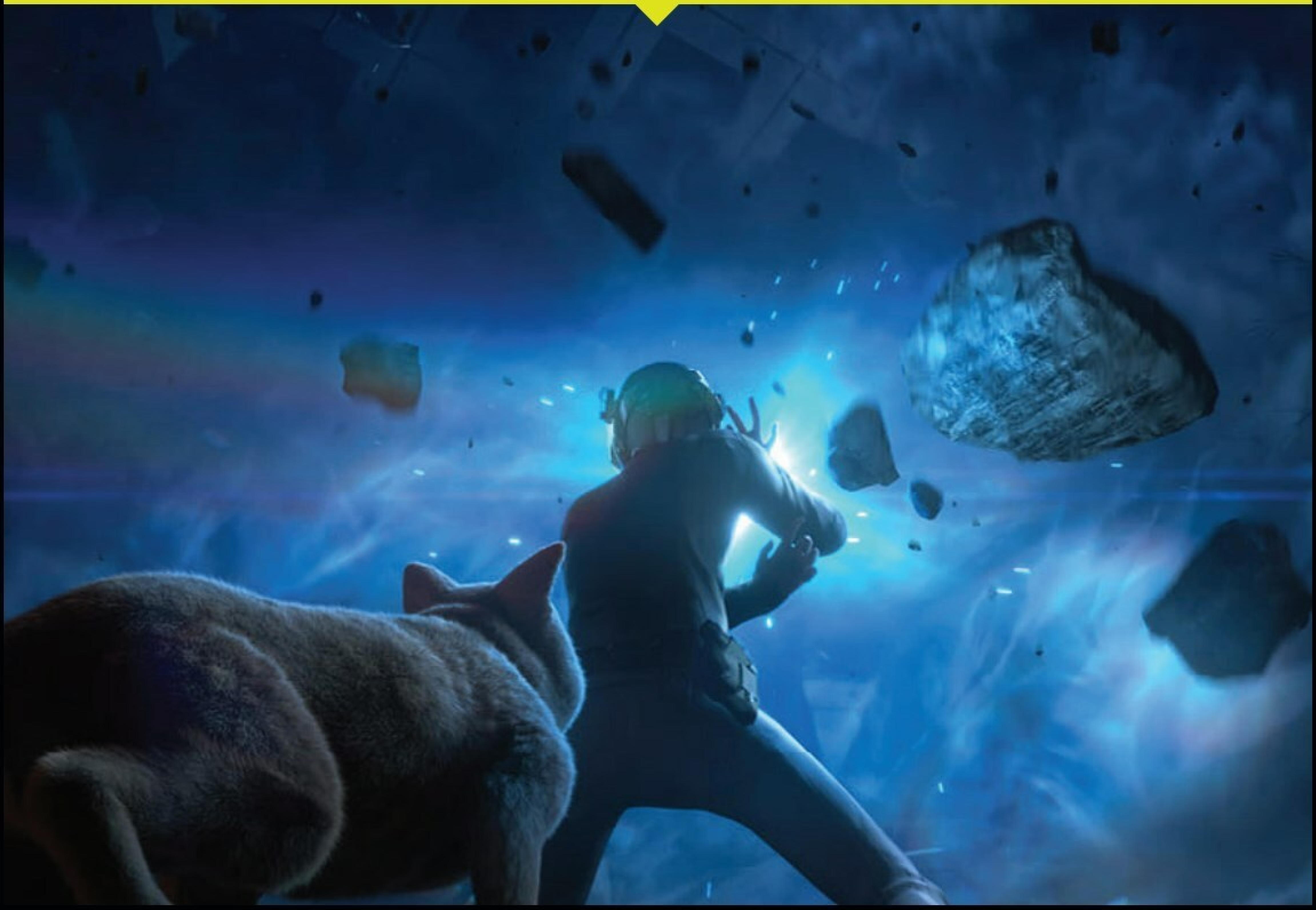
THE GOOD, THE BAD, & THE UGLY

The Good

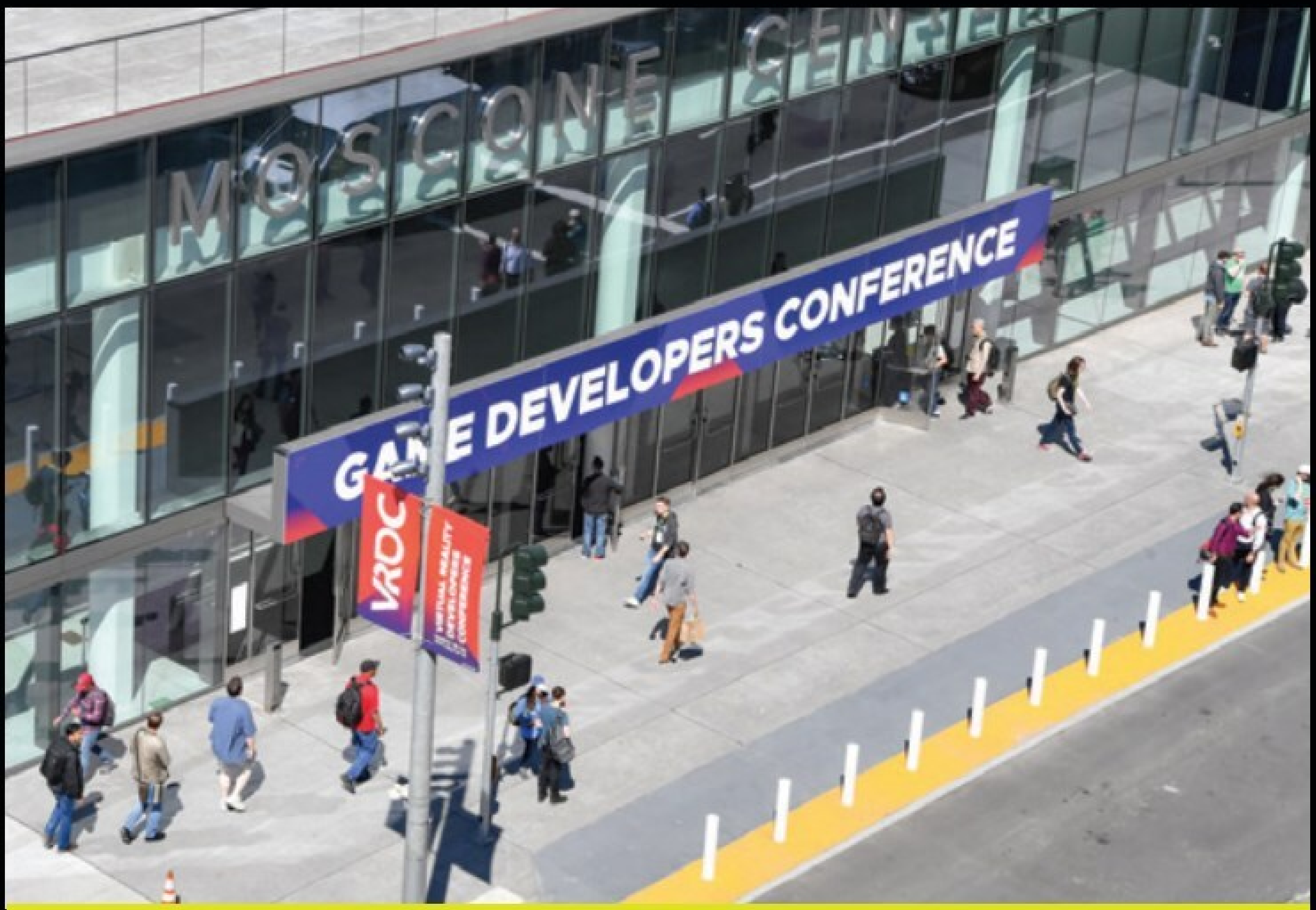


PlatinumGames (Bayonetta, Nier: Automata) announced a new IP owned by the developer under the working title **PROJECT G.G.** The game's debut trailer doesn't show much, but tantalizes with a gigantic beast wreaking havoc on a metropolis and an equally massive hero character rising up to take it on. No release timeframe for Project G.G. has been announced.

The Bad

Bloomberg reports that a scarcity of components is making it difficult for Sony to keep the manufacturing cost of the **PLAYSTATION 5** under $450 per unit. The standard PS4 costs $299 at retail, and the PS4 Pro is at $399. Whether Sony sells the PS5 at a loss per unit to keep the holiday 2020 console under $450 at retail remains to be seen, as the company has not announced the system's price (and neither has competitor Microsoft for the Xbox Series X) or full feature set at the time of this writing.

PS5



The Ugly

The **CORONAVIRUS** has already had a major impact on the video games industry. This year's Game Developers Conference, originally scheduled for March in San Francisco, has been postponed until an undetermined date this summer.

Concerns about the virus also caused Sony to pull out of PAX East in Boston, where it planned to let the public get hands-on with The Last of Us Part II, and disrupted the manufacture and release of goods such as the Switch version of The Outer Worlds and the Valve Index VR headset. ◆

Quotable

"...We'll be doing something we'd like to have done more of the first time around – giving a focused team the time to test and iterate, focusing on gameplay first."

– **Casey Hudson**, BioWare general manager, announcing that Anthem is undergoing a "substantial reinvention" over the coming months.

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Apple Arcade Is The Mobile Scene I've Wanted

by Matt Miller, previews editor

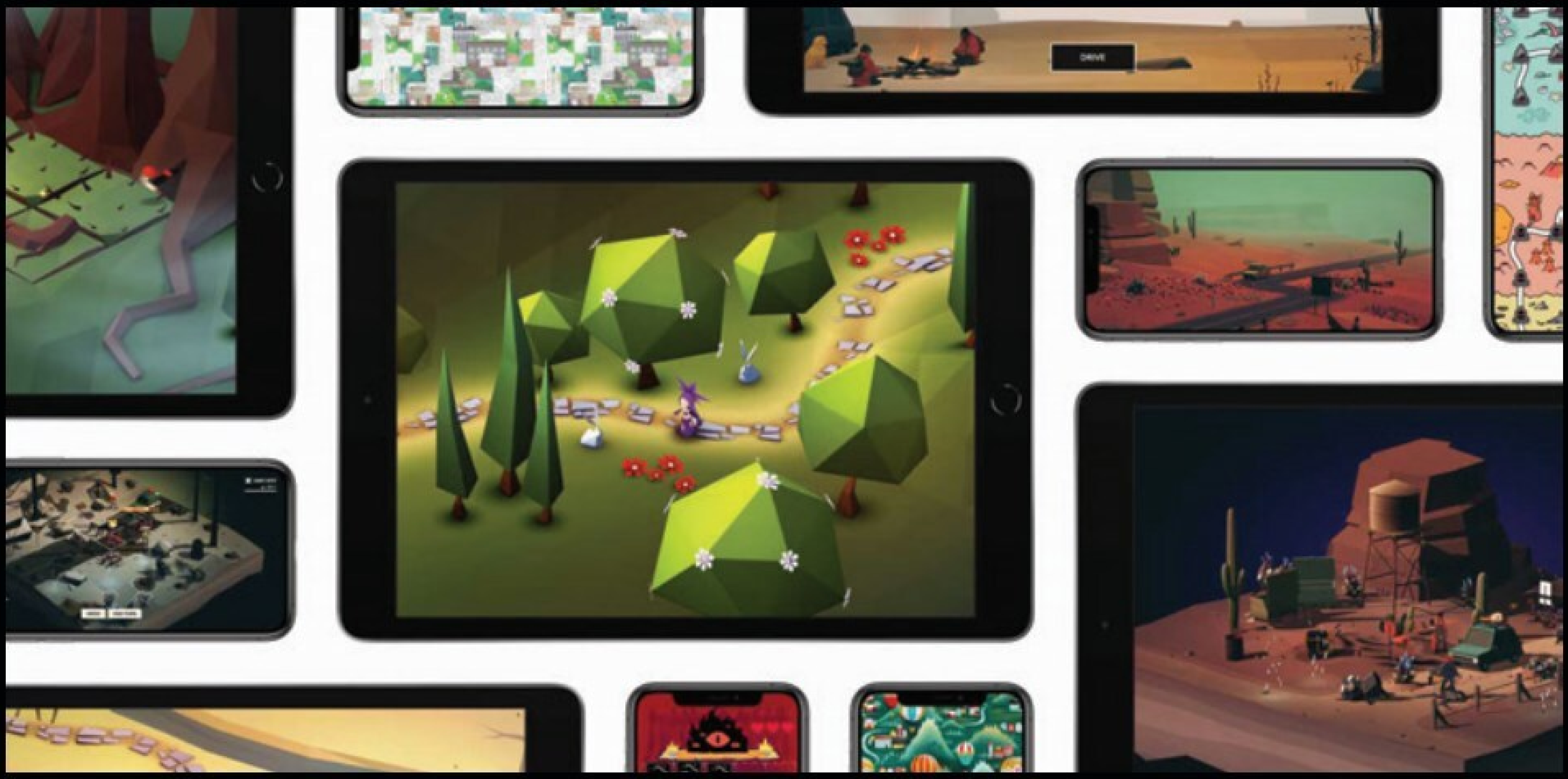
Some years ago, I was excited by the potential of the growing mobile-games movement. For a time, I saw fresh and talented developers experimenting with new ideas, pushing the boundaries of the technology, and innovating to confront challenging control-scheme requirements. But as the years passed, I drifted away. While a few standout projects appeared every year, the endless microtransactions, advertisements, copycat games, and outright exploitative practices employed by so many others pushed me to more traditional platforms. I felt bad, because I knew there were still some diamonds in the rough within the ever-growing mobile library, but the whole environment felt so gross that I began to just stay away.

When Apple announced a new model for a portion of its mobile-game ecosystem a few months ago, it's fair to say that I was deeply suspicious. When a retail outlet has been selling a glut of subpar products for years, it's hard to buy into the idea that they've created a walled-off part of the store where I can consistently expect to find quality items. And yet, against my best speculation, that's exactly what has happened with the arrival of Apple Arcade.

Given how shoddy much of the mobile landscape has been in recent years, I wouldn't fault anyone for having not kept up with the pitch. This is the concept, in brief: Apple has a new section in its App Store dedicated to "Arcade." For a relatively affordable subscription fee (free for the first month, $4.99 a month after that), you gain access to a library of over 100 curated games, with a new entry arriving almost every week since launch. Download them at your leisure, and even play them offline. And without exception, none of the games feature ads or microtransactions.

It's that last part that convinced me to give it a shot – I harbor a particularly militant dislike of microtransactions in my personal gaming – but I fully expected to find a mishmash of half-baked projects. Here, again, I was surprised. It's not that every game title on the list is a hit; there were plenty that I played for five minutes and then offloaded from my phone. But as I delved through the dozens of releases, I became increasingly impressed. In several cases, these were games that not only held my attention while waiting in line at the coffee shop, but also games that might compete for my attention in those precious free-time hours at the end of the day.

Oceanhorn 2 borrows liberally from action/adventures like Zelda to create an engaging and rewarding fantasy. Grindstone capitalizes on touch controls with an engaging mechanic that walks the line between puzzler and RPG. Sayonara Wild Hearts offers an '80's synth-pop fantasy of ballet motorcycle races and timed button presses. The makers of Monument Valley bring us Assemble with Care, a thoughtful puzzle game with a poignant message, uniquely suited for touchscreen play. I laughed at the absurd premise of Sneaky Sasquatch, where I controlled a mythic forest monster as he snags picnic lunches from unsuspecting campers. And then there's What the Golf?, a zany golf game about anything except real golf, which scratches the same itch as classics like Katamari Damacy.



It's possible that Apple has failed to adequately tout the other especially cool feature of Apple Arcade – that the games that come with the subscription can also be played on an Apple TV unit. While I wouldn't stack that experience up against similarly priced home consoles like the Switch, it's an awfully nice bonus if you've already slotted an Apple TV into your home-theater setup. Syncing up a supported Bluetooth controller (including PS4 or Xbox One) is simple, and I found it easy to keep my game flowing seamlessly from my phone onto my gaming TV. In this format, strong action games like Bleak Sword shine, and the brightly colored paper-plane flights of Lifeslide really pop. It's also an ideal way to play standout RPGs on the service, like the witty fantasy adolescent adventures in Guildlings or the painfully cutesy and kid-friendly Cat Quest II.

Even with my praise, Apple Arcade has some growing pains ahead if it wants to consistently reach beyond casual players and engage dedicated enthusiasts. The interface to find and select games is too minimal and hard to parse; with so many games, it's difficult to home in on the best the service has to offer. And simply dropping new games week-to-week without warning is a bad strategy; the catalog's growth and long-term potential hinges on opportunities to look ahead and see what's coming next. Perhaps most importantly, we need a few more top-tier must-have games in the mix. While there are plenty of genuinely good games on Apple Arcade, the platform is begging for a couple more standouts – system sellers should still be a goal, even if on a fundamental level, Apple isn't trying to sell a system.

Even if it hasn't yet hit its full potential, Apple Arcade does a lot of things right, and within my gaming hobby, it's reinvigorated the mobile-gaming space in a powerful way. I'm not arguing that you throw away your PS4 or abandon your Steam library. But if the mobile scene has left you cold in recent years, as it had me, I think Apple's newest gaming venture deserves a shake.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are strictly those of the author and not necessarily those of Game Informer

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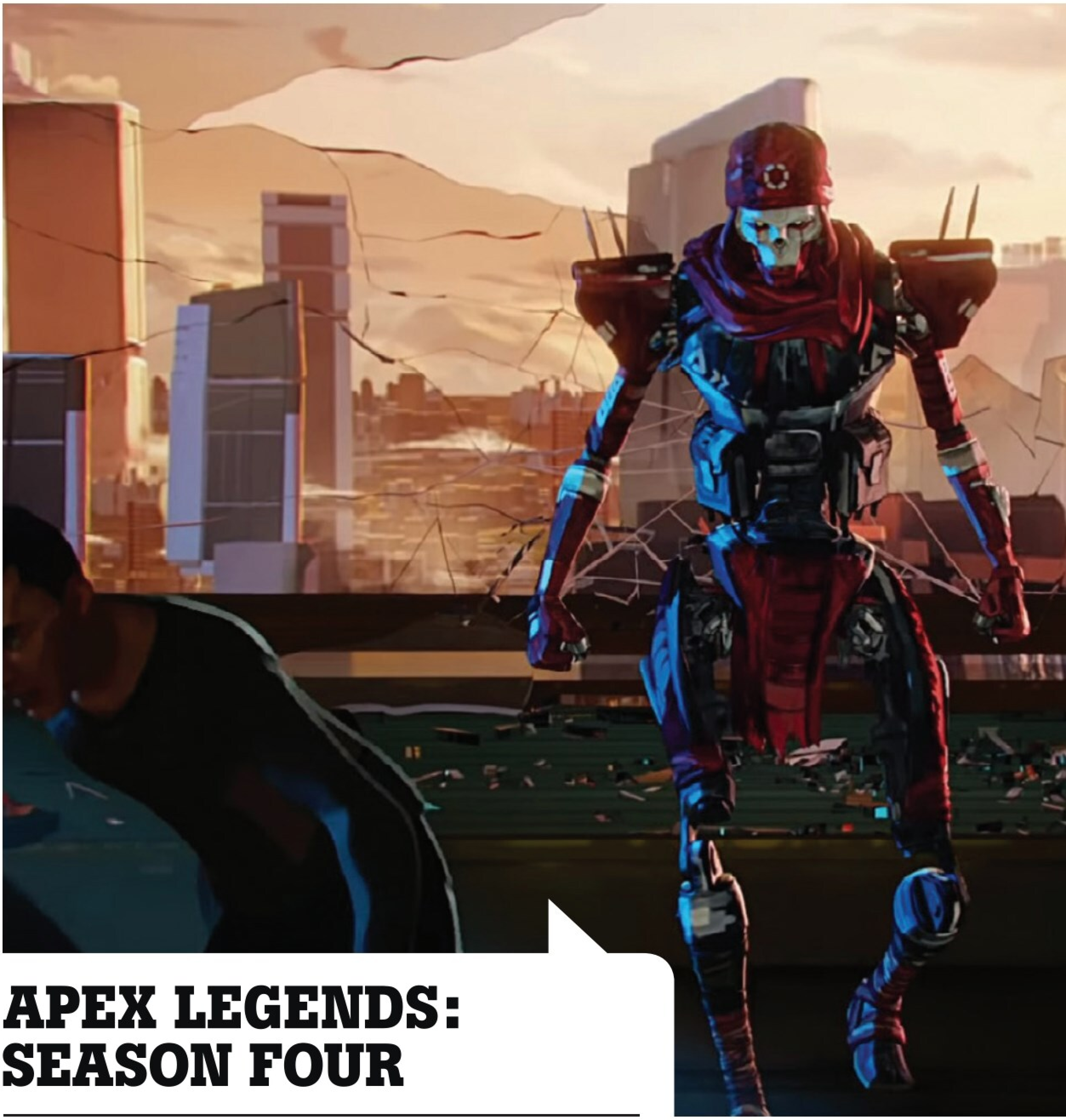


APEX LEGENDS: SEASON FOUR

Apex Legends is in the middle of its fourth season of content, and appears to be settling nicely into the live-service model. We talked to Dusty Welch, Apex Legends' general manager, and Chad Grenier, the game's director, to learn about Respawn Entertainment's approach to making a living game, what players can expect for the remainder of the fourth season, and what comes next. *by Andrew Reiner*

Walk me through the creative process for an Apex Legends season. What factors are in play?

Dusty Welch: It's multiple fronts. We look at what the fans are asking for, and we look at what worked well and didn't from the previous season. We're always learning from the prior seasons. We're always looking to introduce what is good for the game, and we also have a lot of creative storytellers here that are always looking to tell more stories within Apex Legends. Do we do that through various events in the season? Or as you saw with Forge, we did cross-media storytelling with Forge's untimely death. There is no one particular formula that we use. It's a combination of creatives pitching ideas and learning what the game wants and needs from our fanbase.

Let's talk about Revenant's design. He seems more villainous than heroic.

Chad Grenier: Characters start 16 months out, so he's been in our heads for a while. We had some early prototypes and always thought that a character that had his sort of abilities would be fun. We experimented with the wall climbing and the increased crouch speed. The death totem was also something we iterated on for a long time. We thought he'd be a fun addition to the game. The storytellers and writers wanted to put a different sort of spin on our season four character and make him more of a – I don't know if this is the right word – evil kind of character. I think it's just creative minds wanting to do different things and switch it up a bit.

If Revenant was in development for 16 months, you had him around before Apex Legends was released or even announced. Is that right?
CG: In a sense, yeah. The characters change and evolve as they get closer to release. If we loaded up an early version of Revenant, he's probably called something else – some prototype name – and his ability set is probably pretty different. That's when the ideas start to form.

The seasonal format gives you a big shift on day one, but that isn't the end of what's happening over the course of the season. Can you give us an idea of what else we can expect from season four?
CG: I don't want to spoil too much. We will be having some stuff announced shortly that will be pretty exciting for everyone. I will tell you that we just locked in our plan for some major content coming in 2020 which has made the team very excited. We're focused on delivering that content. I really wish I could talk about it. I'm excited about all of the things we're adding to the game. Most of it will be a big surprise for people. We're trying to tell more story and we'll have more characters and depth there. We have more great animated content coming. It's an exciting year for sure.

Where is the team at on crossplay?
DW: I think on crossplay we see it's something that is kind of expected in the industry and is important to a game like ours. Chad and I are obviously big fans of playing our game – at work and in our free time – and we go home on a Friday or weekend and want to play with each other and we're on different systems. On a personal level, yes, we'd love to do that and party up on the weekends. I think it's an important thing to get to.

I've always been curious about the metrics behind these games. Can you tell me which Legend is the most played?
CG: It changes season to season. It's usually Wraith and Pathfinder. They're usually up there.

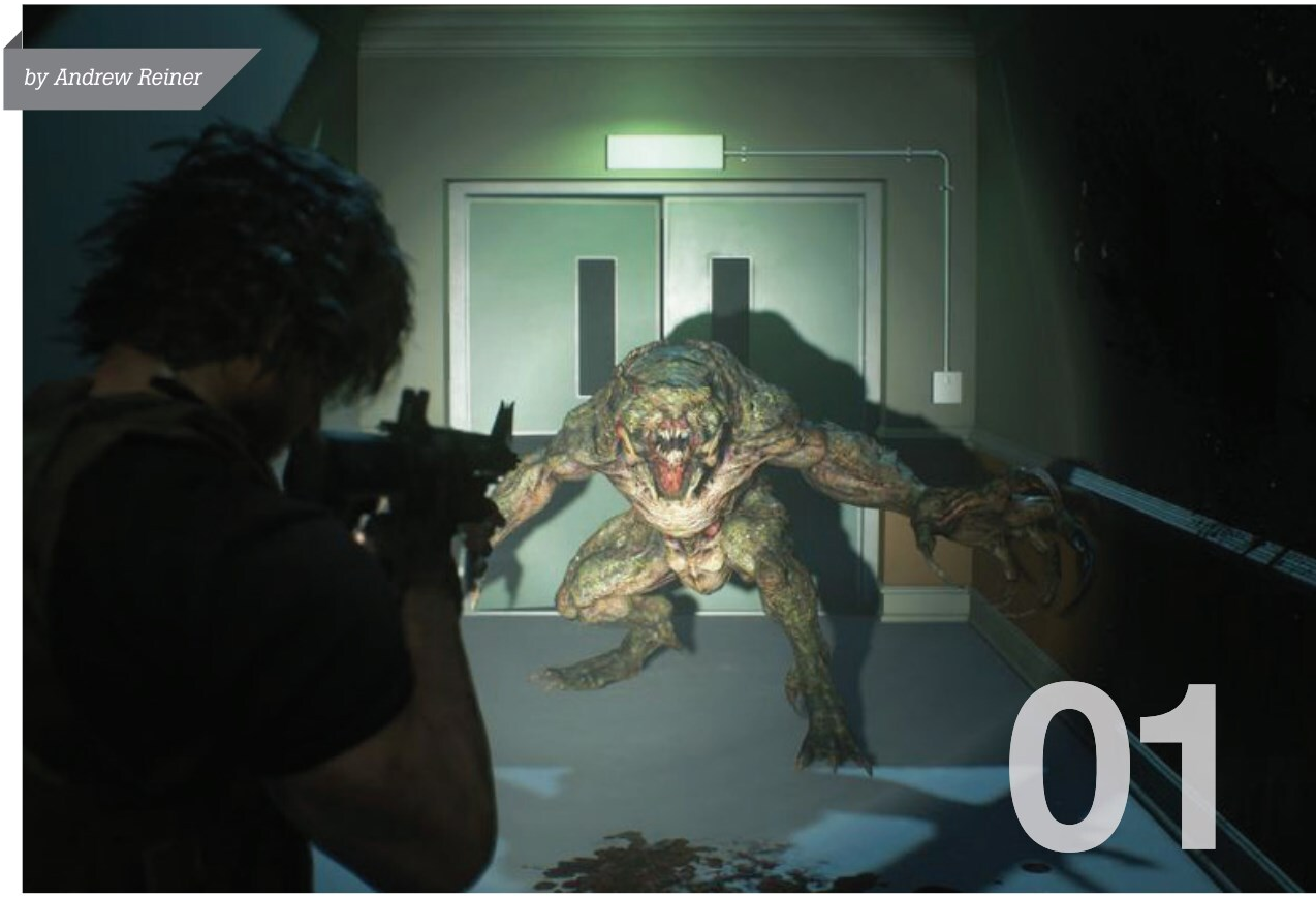
DW: Caustic has been from a pro player or tournament standpoint. He's been an interesting player favorite, especially when they get into the final areas.

CG: We've seen in competitive play Wattson has been a popular pick. It also changes with the game. When we released the Winter Express game mode, Gibraltar was by far the favorite.

Since Apex Legends is connected to the Titanfall universe, can players expect anything that screams Titanfall in season four?
CW: We're always bringing in stuff from the Titanfall universe. We built an awesome world in Titanfall 1 and 2 and want to make sure we're bringing that forward. I will say this: There could potentially be a pleasant surprise for Titanfall fans in season five. ◆

RESIDENT EVIL ENEMIES

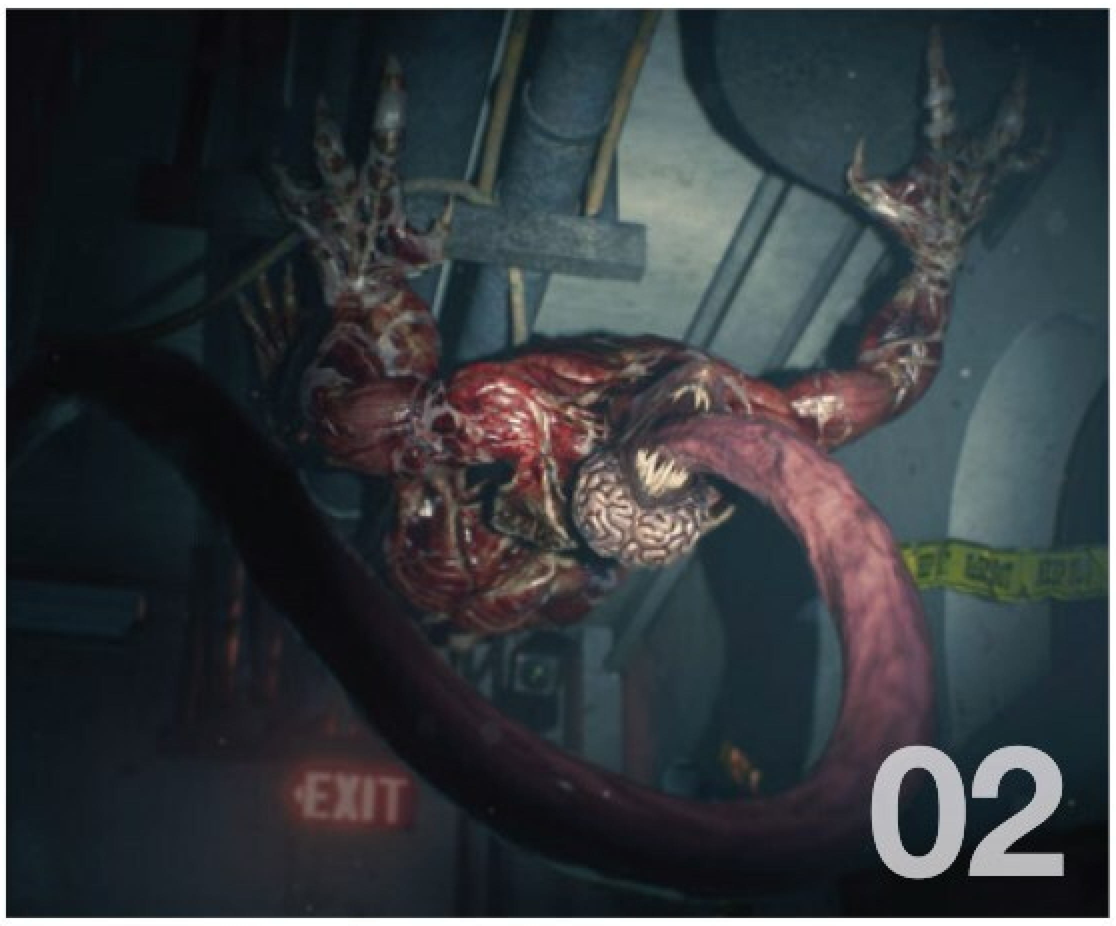
by Andrew Reiner



01

Hunters

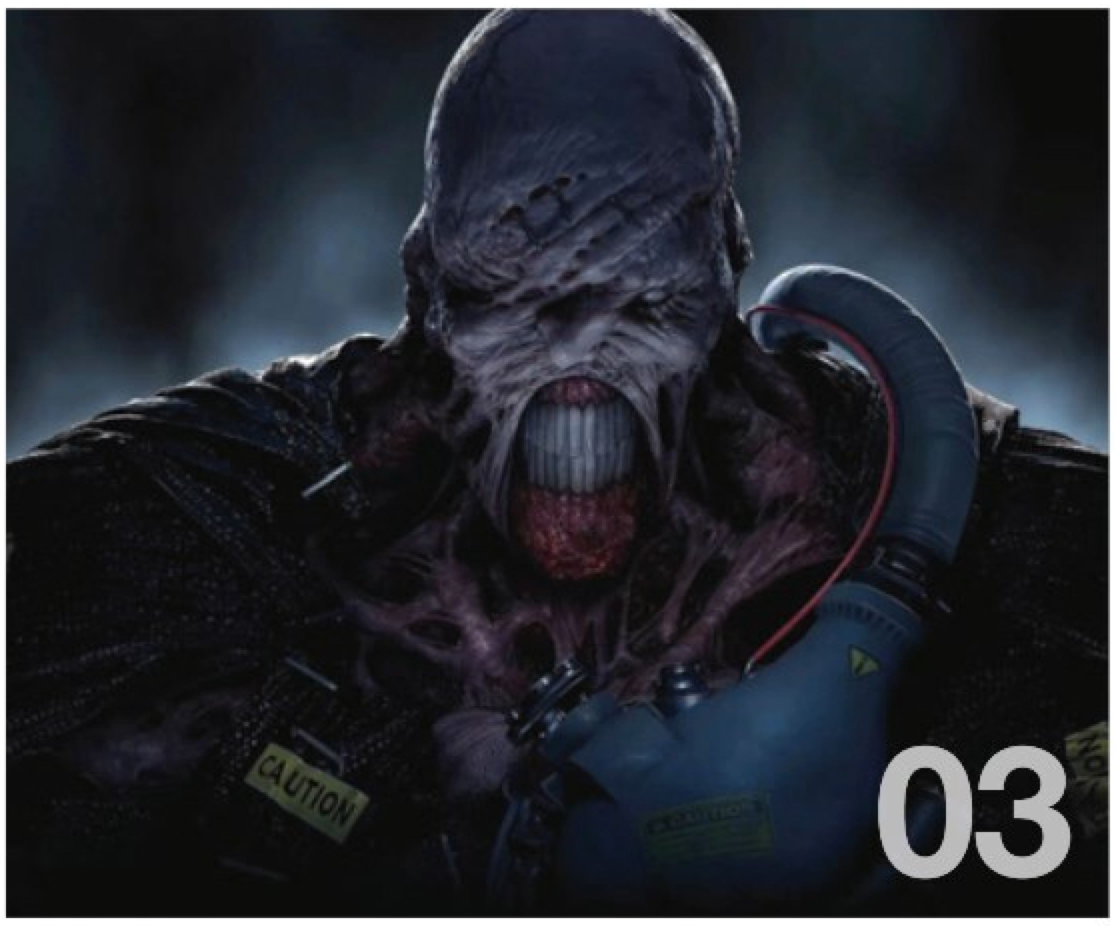
Just when players get the hang of taking down zombies in Resident Evil 1, the mansion's halls repopulate with a far deadlier threat. Bipedal reptilian beasts called Hunters live up to their name and make S.T.A.R.S. members their targets. With wolverine-like claws, the Hunters can decapitate someone with one clean slice.



02

Lickers

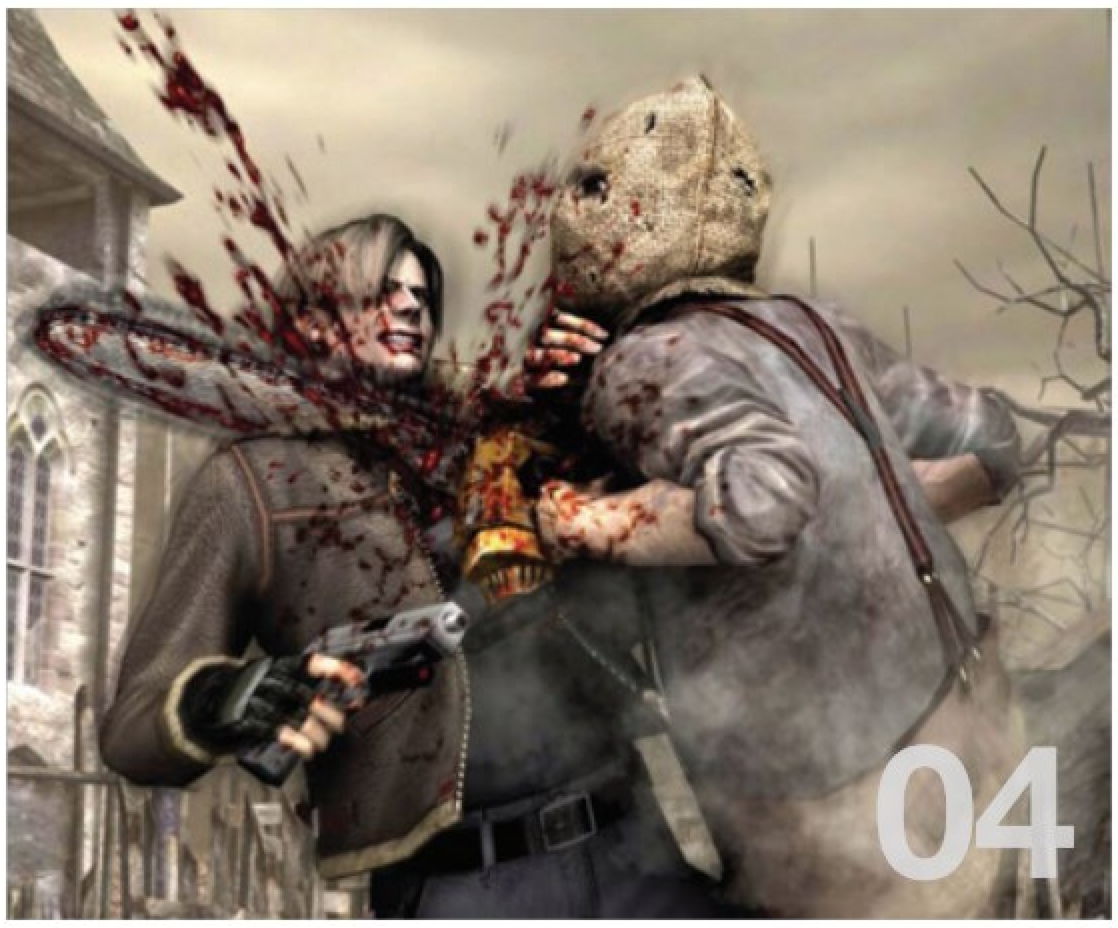
Exposed brain. No eyes. Tongue the size of a hockey stick. Claws designed to kill. If ever there was an enemy designed to strike fear into the player upon first glance, it's the Licker. This beast can even cling to the ceiling to strike when you least expect it.



03

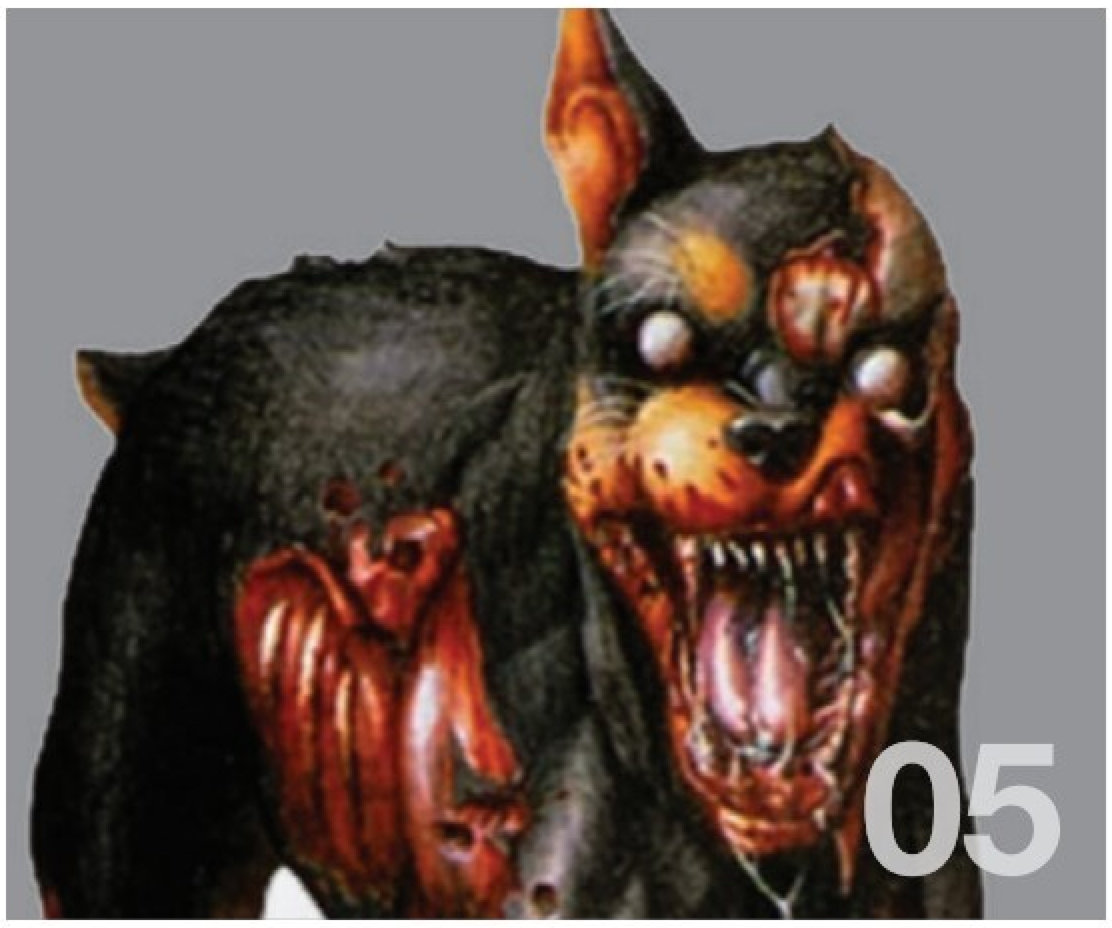
Nemesis

Resident Evil games are designed to make you feel uneasy. Rooms filled with zombies and spiders accomplish this task. Capcom then decided to double down on the unease by introducing an unstoppable threat that keeps hunting you. It first began with Resident Evil 3's Nemesis. He can charge through walls, wield a rocket launcher, and appear when you least expect him to. The popular Mr. X from Resident Evil 2's remake is similar in design.



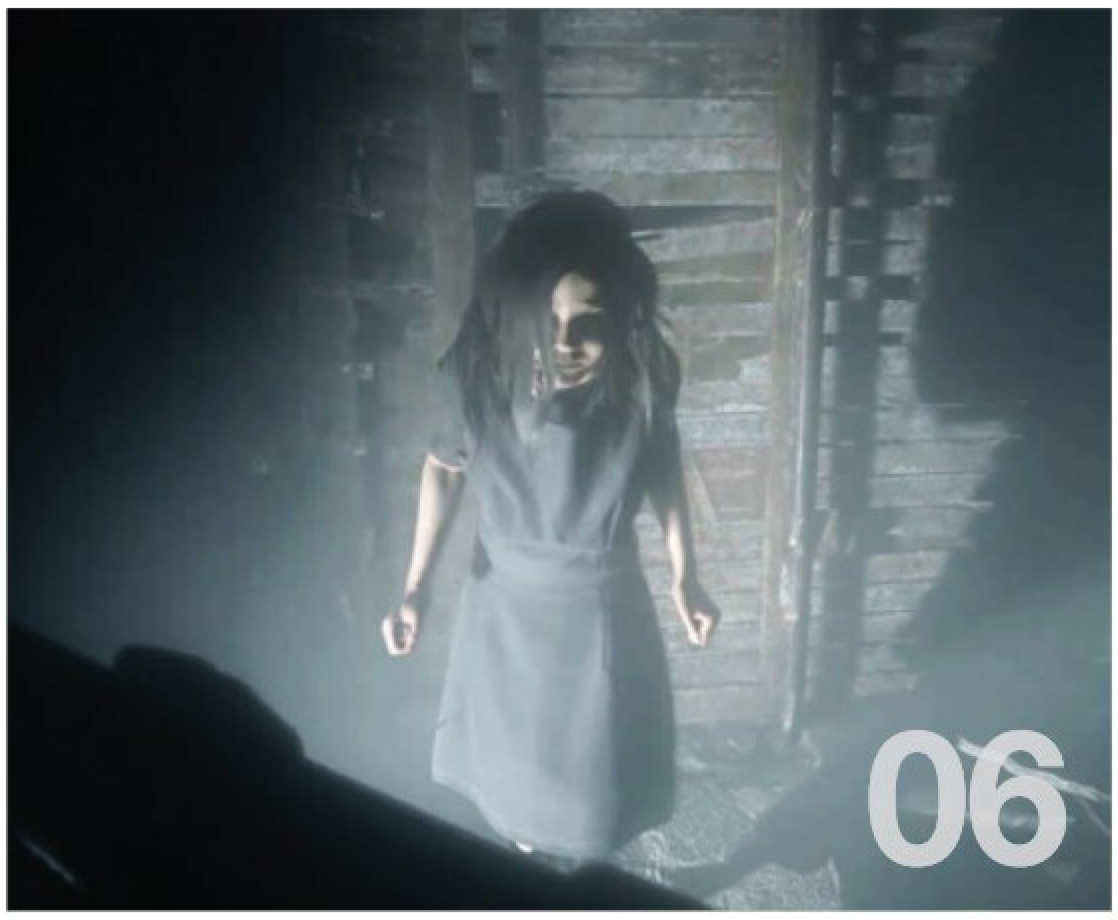
Chainsaw Man

Straight out of a 1970’s slasher film, Chainsaw Man (also known as Dr. Salvador) wears a burlap sack over his face and runs at you with a noisy chainsaw. He’s aggressive, and when his spinning blade hits you, he gets right in your face, making ungodly sounds as your bones get chopped to bits.



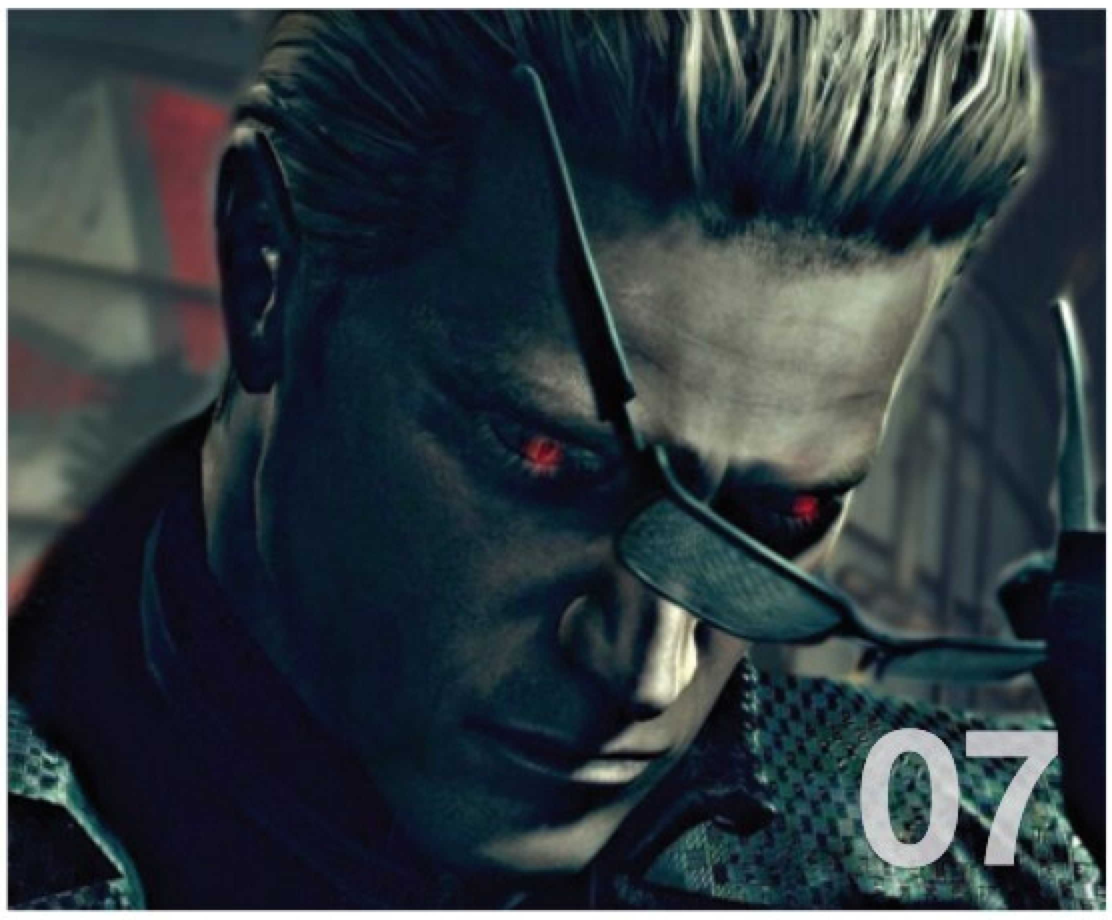
Cerberus

For many players, Cerberus is the most memorable Resident Evil enemy. The zombie dog makes its introduction through a jump scare where it leaps through a window. That moment sets the tone for the entire series. Cerberus is a relatively easy foe to deal with, but the memory of it smashing through a window is always in the back of the player’s mind.



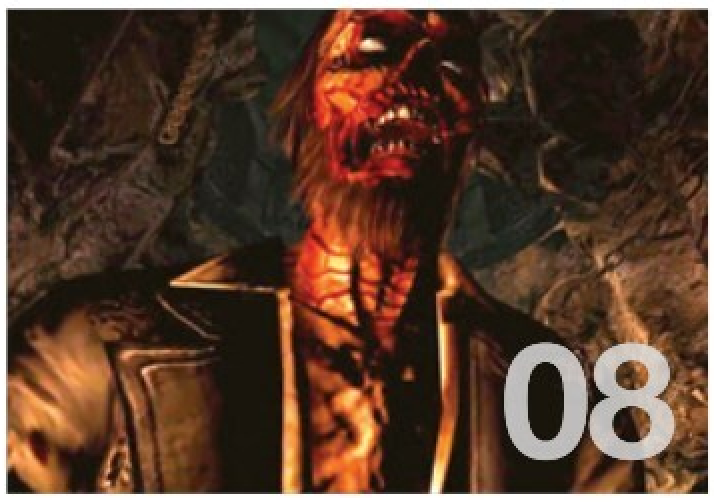
Eveline

She may look like a sweet, little girl, but Eveline is a bioweapon that can control minds. She even manipulated the wills of people to create a family for herself. Being hunted by an evil toddler is terrifying in its own right, but Eveline eventually turns worse. She transforms into a giant puddle of black mold and ooze that screams at you and just wants to end your life.



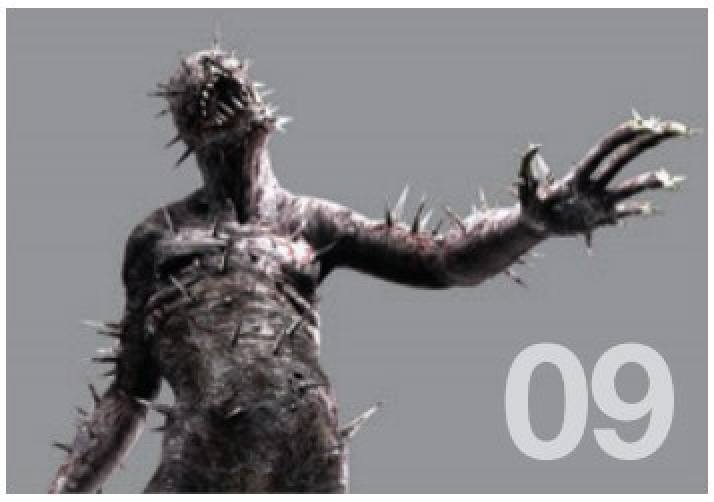
Albert Wesker

Known more for his shades and appearing out of thin air to move the plot along, Albert Wesker proves why he shouldn’t be crossed in Resident Evil 5. Not only does he catch a rocket and throw it back at you and your friend, but his arms also grow, mutate, and knock you senseless.



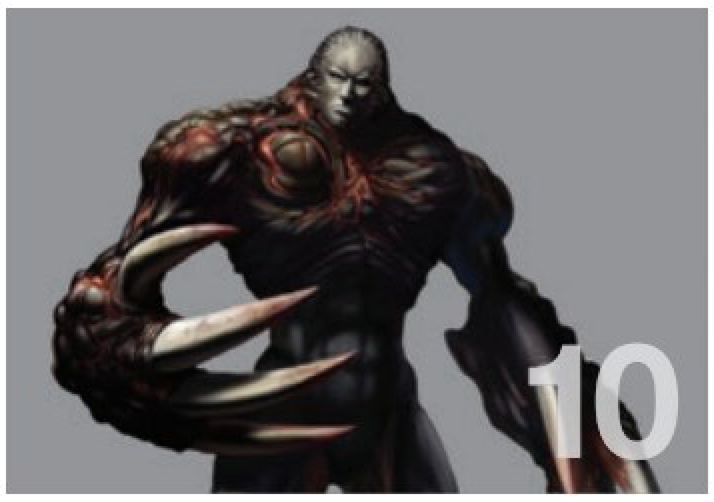
Crimson Heads

Resident Evil’s zombies are just like every zombie out there, but are memorable and deserve to be on this list. Their most fearsome form is the Crimson Head. If a player doesn’t burn their downed bodies in the Resident Evil remake, they come back to life with claws and more vigor. This is a revelation players learn the hard way on their first playthrough.



Regeneradores

These slow-moving Resident Evil 4 foes first appear to be invincible, but you learn heat vision allows you to see the parasites that keep them upright. Shooting a zombie in the head is tough as it is. Having to line up several shots all across a Regeneradore body is even more of a feat and a reason why these baddies are so terrifying, even if they may not look it.



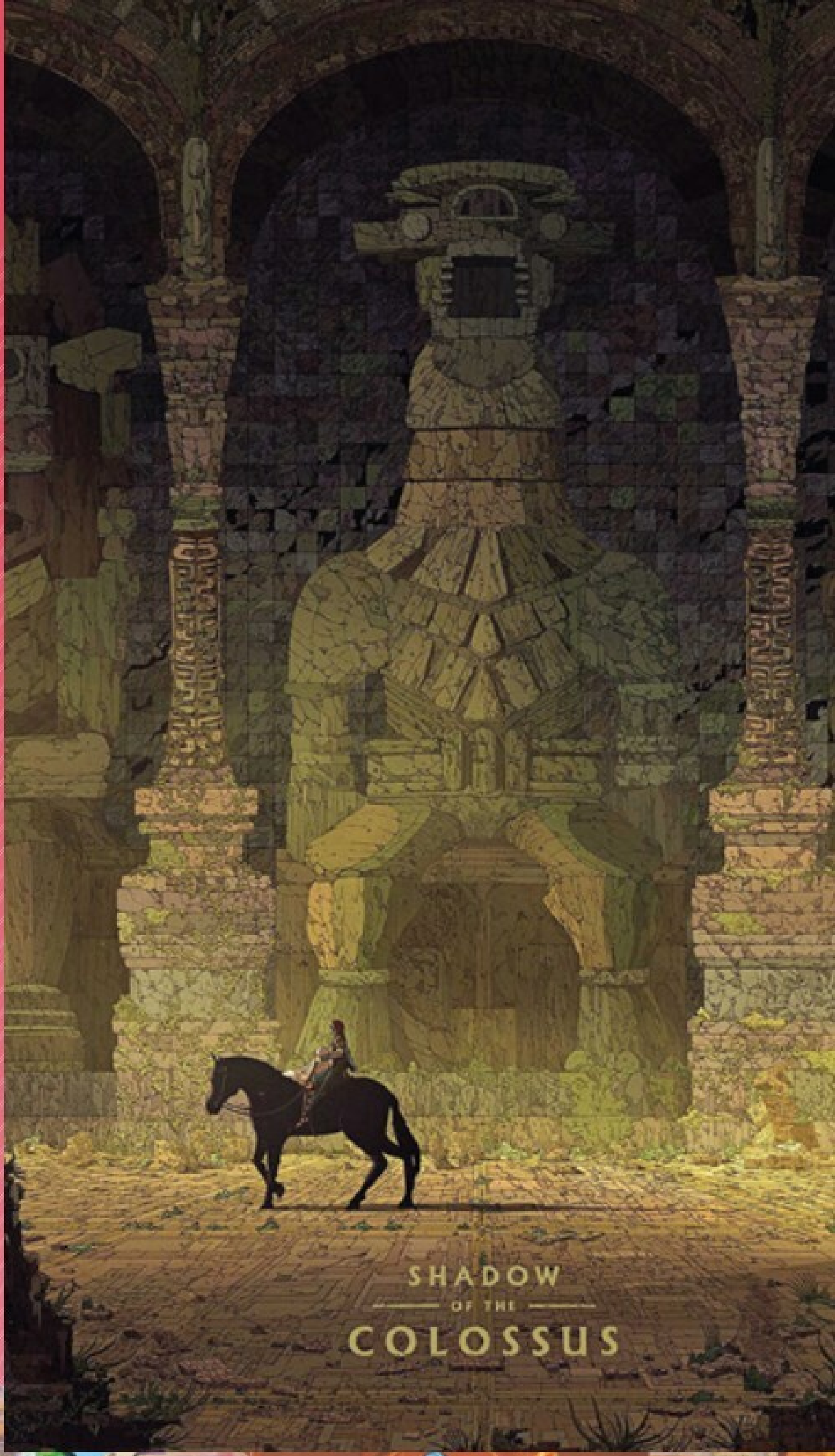
Tyrant

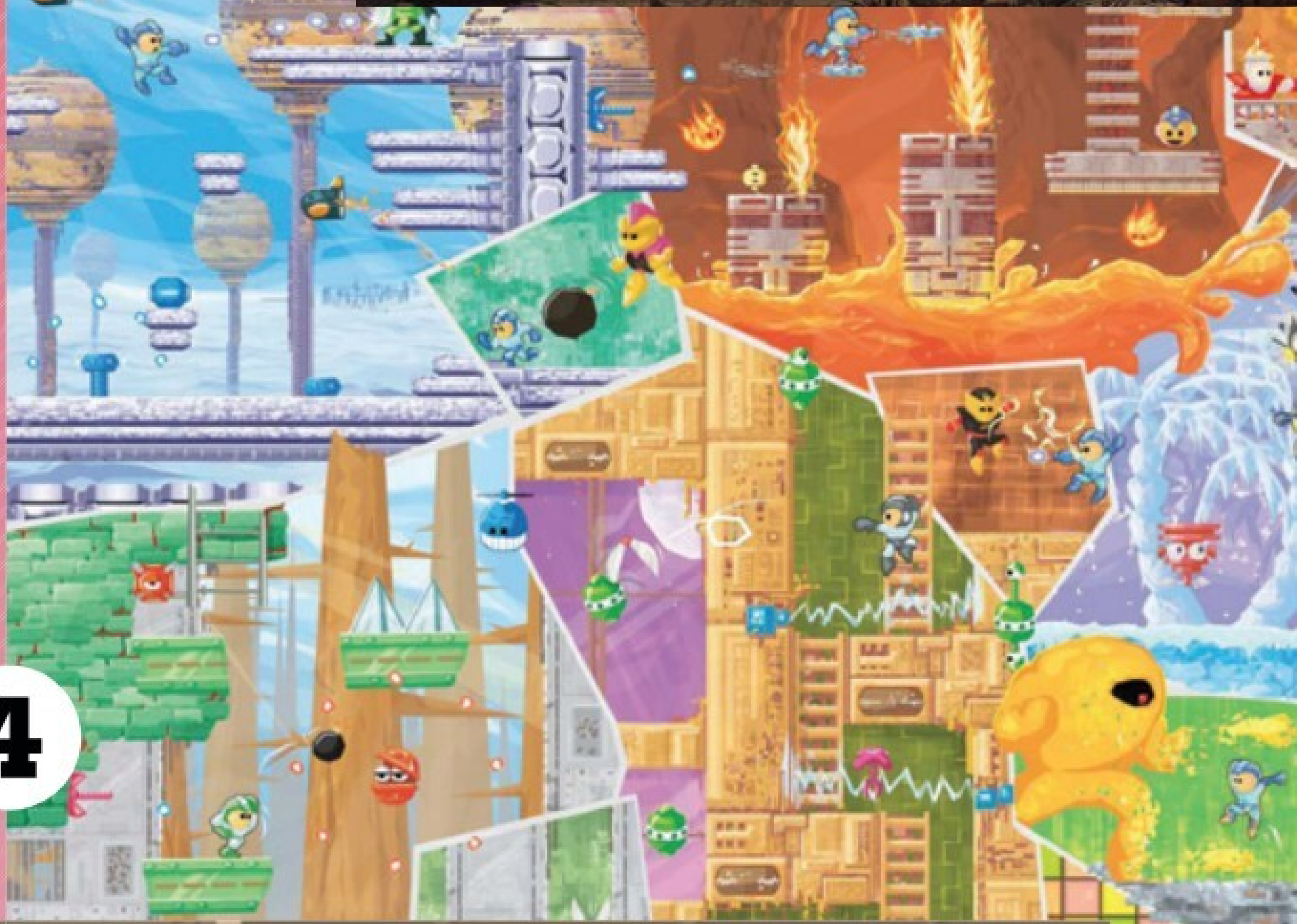
While no match for a rocket launcher, the Tyrant is often the last foe you fight in a Resident Evil game and is considered to be one of Umbrella’s most impressive creations. Seeing its huge beating heart on its chest is also unsettling.

STATE OF THE ART

Rounding up the best in video game-themed décor

We spend a lot of time looking at screens, but these fantastic game-inspired art prints might give you a reason to stare at your walls for a change. If you're looking for a reason to redecorate your game room, here is a roundup of some of the best art on the market. We'd say more, but these amazing images speak for themselves. ***by Ben Reeves***





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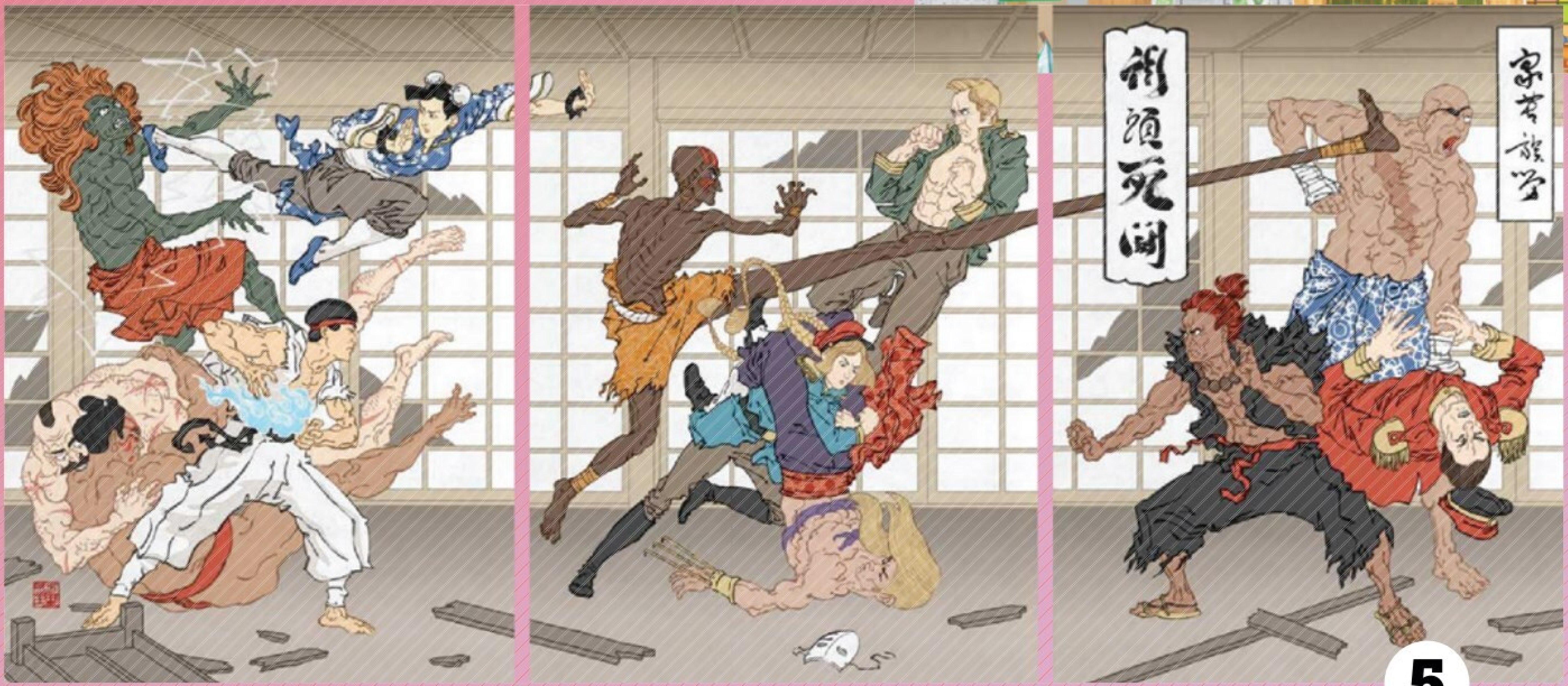

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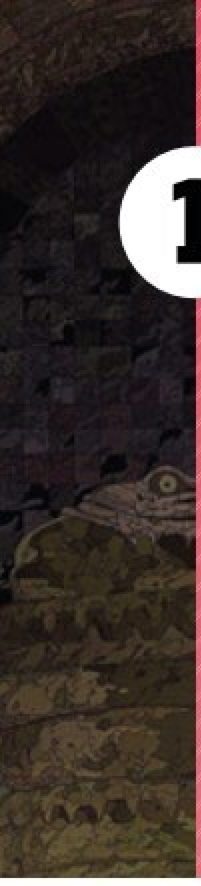

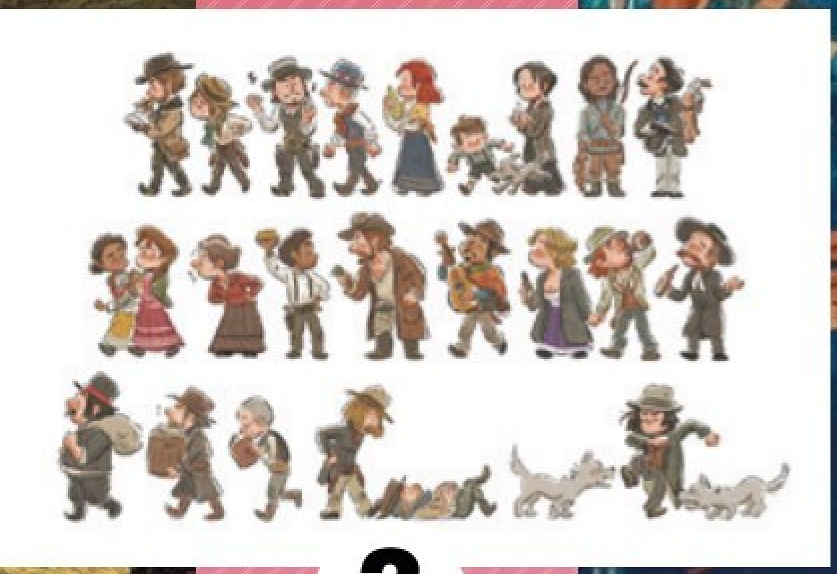

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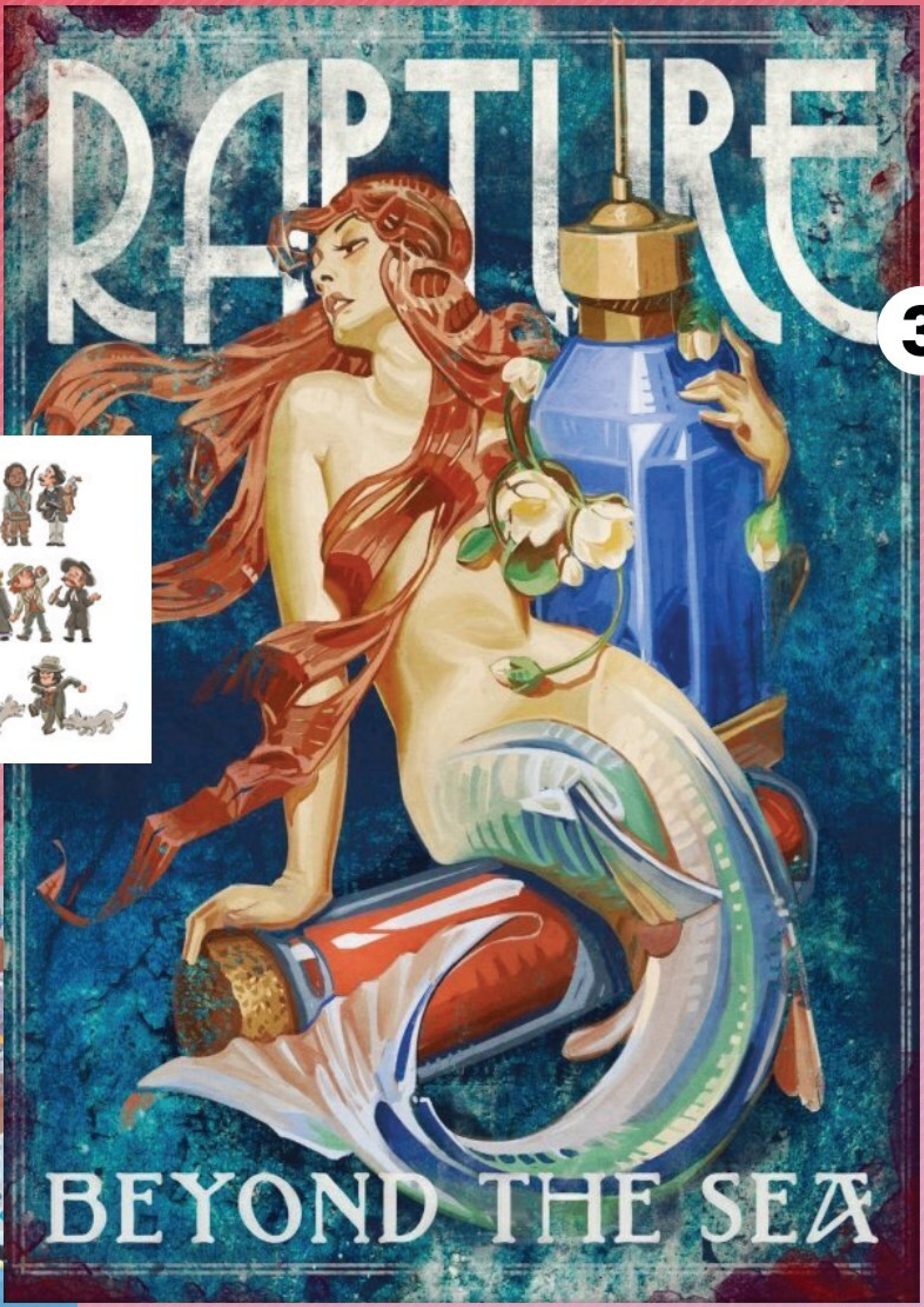

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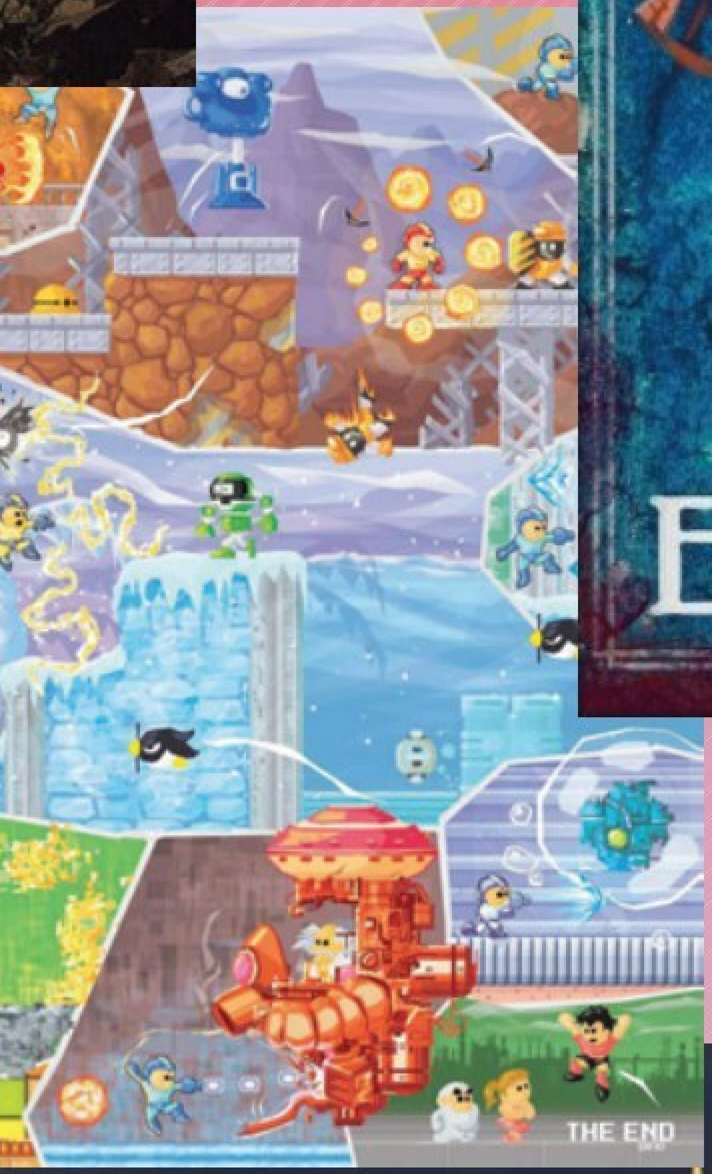

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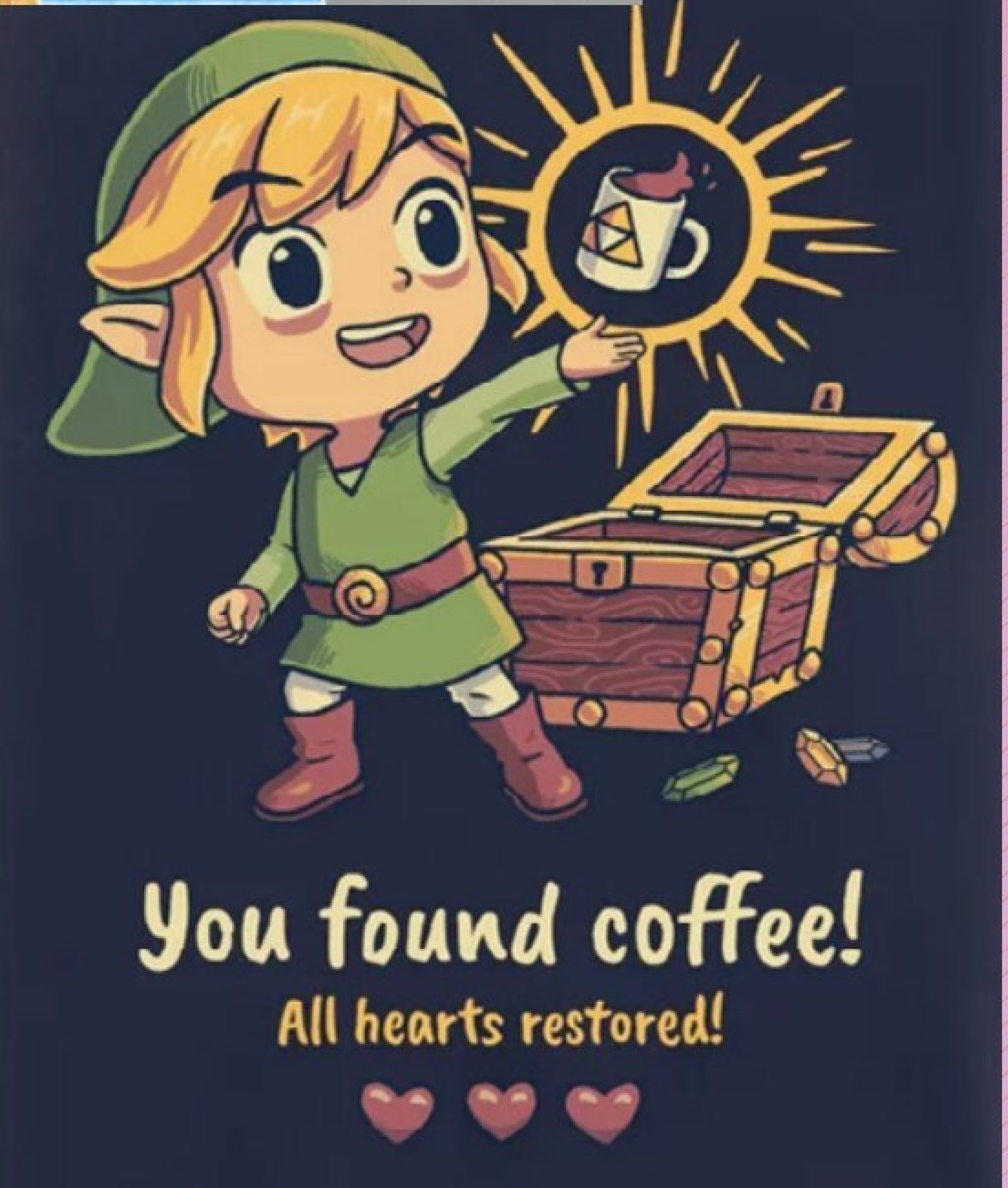
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Shadow of the Colossus Giclée Art Print (17 x 26 in)
$99.99 | cookandbecker.com

❷ Van Der Linde Gang
Red Dead Redemption II Print (9 x 6 in)
$10.00 | ncdoodles.storenvy.com

❸ Rapture
BioShock Art Print (11.6 x 16.5 in)
$14.99 | gametee.co.uk

❹ Megaman
Mega Man Fresco (32 x 24 in)
$65.64 | redbubble.com

❺ Battle in the Bath House
Street Fighter Three-Print Triptych (37 x 11 in)
$90.00 | shop.ukiyoeheroes.com

❻ The Legendary Coffee
The Legend of Zelda Metal Poster (18.9 x 26.6 in)
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Media Shelf

ODYSSEY
P5 1
PERSONAS

ODDWORLD: ABE'S ORIGINS

Fans of the quirky and wonderful Mudokon should adore this comprehensive look at sketches, concept art, and other images that helped shape the look and fiction of Oddworld. Nearly 300 pages are bound beautifully in this hardcover book, which includes an exhaustive interview with series originator, Lorne Lanning.

£40.00
indiebydesign.net

ODYSSEY OF THE DRAGONLORDS

Inspired by Greek myth, this epic campaign setting and adventure for 5th edition Dungeons & Dragons has been crafted from the ground up by some of BioWare's most prominent former creators. Players take on the role of heroes of prophecy unraveling a grand mystery in world of centaurs, satyrs, and dragons.

£39.99
arcanumworlds.com

PERSONA 5 MANGA, VOLUME 1

The vibrant universe of Persona 5 comes alive in new ways in this manga retelling of the video game. This first volume follows Akira Kurusu as he comes to a new school, only to be drawn into a freakish alternate reality to confront a twisted version of one of his schoolteachers, where a strange power awakens within.

$9.99
viz.com

FIGHT TOGETHER, OR DIE ALONE

These recent cooperative board games challenge you and your friends to overcome the odds as a team, with everyone winning or losing as a group

by Matt Miller

1

ATLANTIS RISING (2ND EDITION)

Publisher: Elf Creek Games

The gods are angry! Atlantis has grown too powerful with its mix of mysticism and technology, and the island is now sinking beneath the waves. As leaders of this grand civilization, you must build a cosmic gate through which the population can escape, or face defeat as the island is lost to the ocean amid the endless assaults by vengeful deities. Employing a fascinating mix of worker placement, push-your-luck, and dice-rolling mechanics, it's a game of tension and thoughtful planning, filled with evocative art and a captivating setting. As each turn passes, the most valuable spaces to collect new resources fall into the sea, demanding hard choices about where you go to gather the essential pieces needed to craft the gate. As a bonus, Atlantis Rising also supports a broad range of player counts, from solitary play all the way up to seven simultaneous teammates. If you're looking for a cooperative game unlike anything you've played before, it's well worth trying to save this doomed civilization.

2

WONDER WOMAN: CHALLENGE OF THE AMAZONS

Publisher: Ravensburger

DC's most well-known superheroine finally has an excellent game to call her own. In this brand-new cooperative adventure, Wonder Woman teams up with her fellow Amazons to take on the likes of Ares and Cheetah. The game plays out on the mythical island of Themyscira, and demands that all players capitalize on their unique abilities as they collect ancient and powerful relics like the Lasso of Truth. Challenge of the Amazons features an extremely clever design twist: Players can strategize together at the start of a round, but then additional card options come into play once the fight begins, representing each character's combat instincts, sometimes allowing an individual player to go rogue from the plan to enact a brilliant strategy of their own. The Wonder Woman board game features gorgeous character art and components, including some especially striking bronze-colored miniatures that lend the whole affair the appropriate mythological flair.

3

LAST BASTION

Publisher: Repos Production

Based on the mechanics of the classic cooperative board game, Ghost Stories, Last Bastion casts you and your friends as mighty fantasy heroes ensconced in an ancient fortress while hordes of undead monsters and demons assault the walls. Playable in about an hour, Last Bastion is one of those rare games that offers an accessible learning curve, but is also carefully balanced to be challenging to win. Sturdy components and attractive miniatures help bring the game to life, even as the smartly paced turns and limited action choices demand nearly constant difficult decisions for every player at the table. Win or lose, the constant sense of encroaching danger perfectly captures the vibe of the desperate final stand against the odds. ◆

RETURN OF THE MECHA

Adorn your shelf with new figures drawn from classic anime

by Matt Miller

1

ROBOTECH VF-1J VALKYRIE (RICK HUNTER)

The iconic transforming veritech is, for many U.S. enthusiasts, the first and defining mechanized fighter. This gorgeous 1/72 scale figure stands 7.5 inches tall in "Battloid" mode, but is also fully transformable into all three combat modes for your preferred display. Intricate detailing, light-up LEDs, interchangeable hands, tons of articulation, and an included display stand help make this an impressive figure for any collection, and a potent callback to the earliest days of the craze here in the United States.

$112 | kitzconcept.hk

U.N.SPACY
VF
VF

2

POP! ANIMATION – NEON GENESIS EVANGELION EVA-01

Looking to add yet another franchise to your growing collection of Funko Pops? This super-sized 6-inch vinyl reimagines the familiar EVA-01 from Neon Genesis Evangelion, and translates it into the equally familiar Funko styling. The stylized capture nonetheless manages to embody the bright hues and careful detail that was apparent in the original design. If you want a more complete set, you can also snag standard-sized Pops for Shinji, Rei, and Asuka and array them all together, even as you continue to puzzle through exactly what happened in the end of that series.

$19.99 | funko.com

3

GUNDAM HEAVYARMS MODEL KIT

One of a broad array of Bandai's highly detailed model kits within the long-running Gundam franchise, the Heavyarms unit launches out of the Gundam Wing series, with an especially cool mix of weaponry and unique coloring. If you don't mind putting in a little work on the front end, your completed kit includes a fully poseable 1/100 scale figure with an array of missile pods, a knife, a shield, and of course that giant beam Gatling. The snap-together model requires no gluing, and the pieces are molded in different colors of plastic, so painting is only required if you want to add additional detail.

$60.00 | bluefinbrands.com

» PLATFORM
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» STYLE
1-Player Action
(5-Player Online)

» PUBLISHER
Capcom

» DEVELOPER
Capcom

» RELEASE
April 3

A RETURNING NEMESIS

by
BEN REEVES

resident evil 3

Inside
Capcom's plan
to redeem
Resident Evil 3

T

The original Resident Evil 3: Nemesis is one of the most overlooked entries in Capcom's iconic survival-horror series. The game is not as tightly designed or spooky as the fan-favorite Resident Evil 2, nor is it the redefining, pitch-perfect action game that was Resident Evil 4. Instead, Resident Evil 3: Nemesis sits somewhere in the middle. It offered a more action-focused horror experience, but it was constrained by archaic PS1-era controls and muddy visuals. Those imperfections are only magnified through a modern lens, which makes Nemesis a chore to revisit. In short, Resident Evil 3 needs more than a facelift; it needs a complete structural overhaul.

Capcom hasn't shied away from that challenge. With last year's Resident Evil 2 remake, the company proved it could update its classic survival-horror formula, delivering what many consider the best remake on the market. However, revisiting Resident Evil 3 may be an even more daunting task. Not only is the source material less beloved, but only a year has passed since Capcom's last blockbuster remake; if fans are ready for another remake, their expectations are higher than ever. In order for Resident Evil 3 to succeed, Capcom must do more than simply improve on its original design – it has to outdo itself.

Like the original Resident Evil 3: Nemesis, the remake follows Jill Valentine as she explores the dilapidated streets of Raccoon City

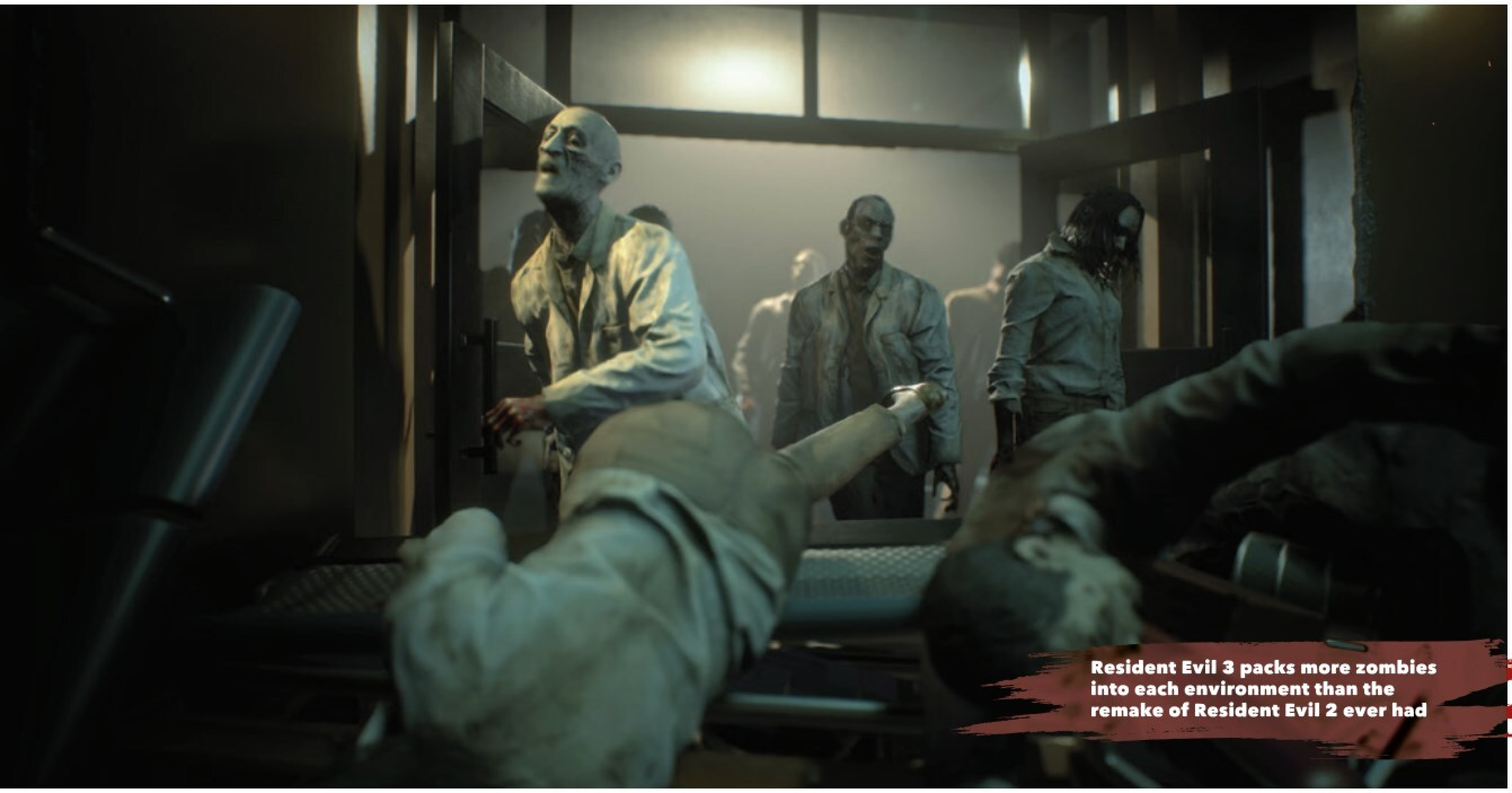
ANOTHER BLOODY VALENTINE

Jill wasn't supposed to be the star of Resident Evil 3. Capcom originally had an entirely different vision for the third entry. After the enormous success of Resident Evil 2 in 1998, Capcom greenlit several Resident Evil projects. One of these projects was an official sequel set on a luxury cruise liner, starring Umbrella security officer Hunk, who first appeared in Resident Evil 2. The gas-mask-wearing Hunk was a fan favorite, but this project was eventually cancelled.

As development on the original version of Resident Evil 3 progressed, Capcom realized the project wouldn't be completed before the debut of Sony's PlayStation 2 console, so Capcom's leadership asked the team to shift their priorities to an entirely new game for Sony's more advanced system. That project ultimately became Devil May Cry. However, this change left Capcom in a bind, since it was contractually obligated to release a third Resident Evil on Sony's original PlayStation. The publisher needed to find a way to make an entirely new Resident Evil game in under a year.

Capcom turned to a relatively inexperienced team who had been experimenting with a spin-off game set inside the Resident Evil universe. The initial plan was to allow fans to play as ordinary Raccoon City citizens on the day of the zombie outbreak, but when the project was promoted and rechristened as Resident Evil 3, the studio felt that it needed to rework the narrative. Capcom wanted a main character that fans could rally behind – a hero who deserved more time in the spotlight. The studio needed someone like Jill Valentine.

One of the two primary protagonists in the original Resident Evil, Jill was an established part of the franchise, and the team knew they could easily build off RE's



Resident Evil 3 packs more zombies into each environment than the remake of Resident Evil 2 ever had

fiction. In the original Resident Evil, Jill and her fellow police officers get trapped inside a zombie-infested mansion, where they ultimately discover that these undead creatures are the result of a virus designed by the pharmaceutical giant Umbrella Corporation. Jill's encounter with these flesh eaters completely reshaped her. As Resident Evil 3 opens, Jill is now a battle-tested warrior, obsessed with bringing those responsible for the outbreak to justice.

"She experienced a lot with the mansion incident," says remake producer Peter Fabiano. "She's just coming out of that, and she's obsessed with what's going on with Umbrella. She's always been tough, right? She's a police officer, after all. Part of who she is is a capable, strong hero."

Capcom asked us not to reveal many of the story moments we experienced during our demos, but we can say that the remake strikes an artful balance between staying true to the original's blueprint while also delivering surprises for fans who know the original by heart. "It's always a challenge," Fabiano says. "You want to be faithful to the source material, but you want to make it feel fresh. It's always about striking that balance. I think you're going to find that we have made some adaptations and changes, but the essence and the core of what made RE3 is still there."

Those who played both versions of Resident Evil 2 can expect a similar treatment here. Capcom has reimagined some of the original Resident Evil 3's story beats for the remake, but many of the core themes remain. Jill's battle to survive the night in Raccoon City is still the narrative spine. Moreover, Jill is the competent, no-nonsense heroine that fans know and love.

"She's a character that's been put into so many dangerous situations, been up against so many supernatural threats, and she's always found a means of overcoming those things," says producer Masachika Kawata. "She is somebody that doesn't give up. This is somebody that's always willing to push themselves forward and make sure they're able to survive."

Unfortunately, Umbrella is all too aware of Jill's exploits and her covert investigation into the company's dirty secrets. As a result, Umbrella plans to assassinate Jill, but they don't hire a hitman to carry out this act of corporate espionage like any conventional faceless evil. Instead, Umbrella grows its own monstrous bioweapon, implanted with an innate drive to hunt her down. This bioweapon is called the Nemesis, and it becomes Jill's nightmare, stalking her relentlessly throughout the campaign.

To find out if Resident Evil 3 is moving in the right direction, we went hands-on with a near-final build for several hours, talked with members of the development team in Japan, and played an exclusive section of the game that no one outside the studio has seen.

BACK ON THE MEAN STREETS

Society has completely collapsed. Raccoon City is a maze of abandoned cars and corpses. The windows of a nearby grocery store have been shattered – its food stores looted. Riot fires flicker off the glass of distant skyscrapers, and the moans of a thousand zombies echo through the concrete canyons of the city. Jill Valentine steps over an indistinguishable red stain on a nearby sidewalk – it is both a sign that something terrible has happened and a warning of what could happen to her if she's not careful.

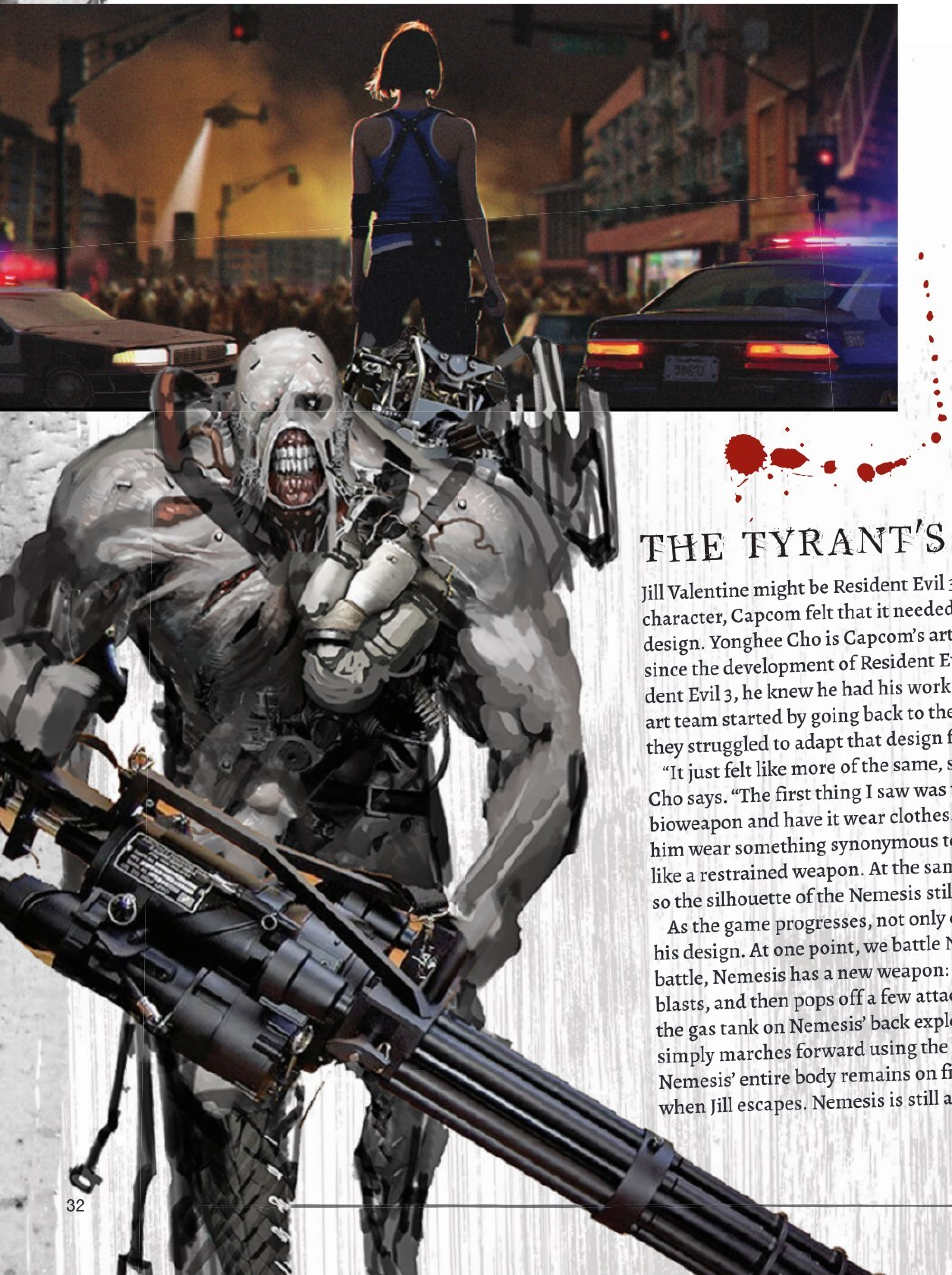
The first two Resident Evil games are a small window into the events surrounding the outbreak at Raccoon City, but Resident Evil 3 offers an unflinching look at that widespread disaster. Raccoon City feels more vibrant and alive than ever before – or at least it would if it wasn't falling into decay.

"Despite the fact that we've been working on Resident Evil for so long, and we've had multiple games take place in Raccoon City, I surprisingly found that there wasn't a lot of original source material to work off," says art director Yonghee Cho. "So, I wanted to make sure that this time you're able to walk through the city and look through all the intricacies of different buildings. I wanted to make sure that we showed that this was a place people had actually inhabited, that players could imagine people living in this area before the outbreak."

Raccoon City isn't the only thing getting an overhaul. Jill looks tougher than ever before. In the original Resident Evil 3, Jill was poorly dressed for a zombie outbreak. Her skimpy tube top and miniskirt are the epitome of oversexed '90s character design. The remake gave Capcom an opportunity to rethink that look.

"There were a lot of discussions internally about that direction," Cho says. "The original design of Jill Valentine was clearly going for sex appeal, but that was not the right direction. This is a very strong character, and it is a character that's going through a lot of adversity, so we wanted to home in on that and make sure that there's a certain level of believability in what she's wearing, a certain level of practicality."

Jill's modern look is an example of the larger overhaul Resident Evil 3 has received. As with last year's Resident Evil 2 remake, Capcom has modernized the level design and core combat so Resident Evil 3 now plays like a modern third-person shooter, but Capcom still holds to the spirit of the original game. One of the best examples of this is Capcom's reenvisioning of a basic combat maneuver: the dodge.

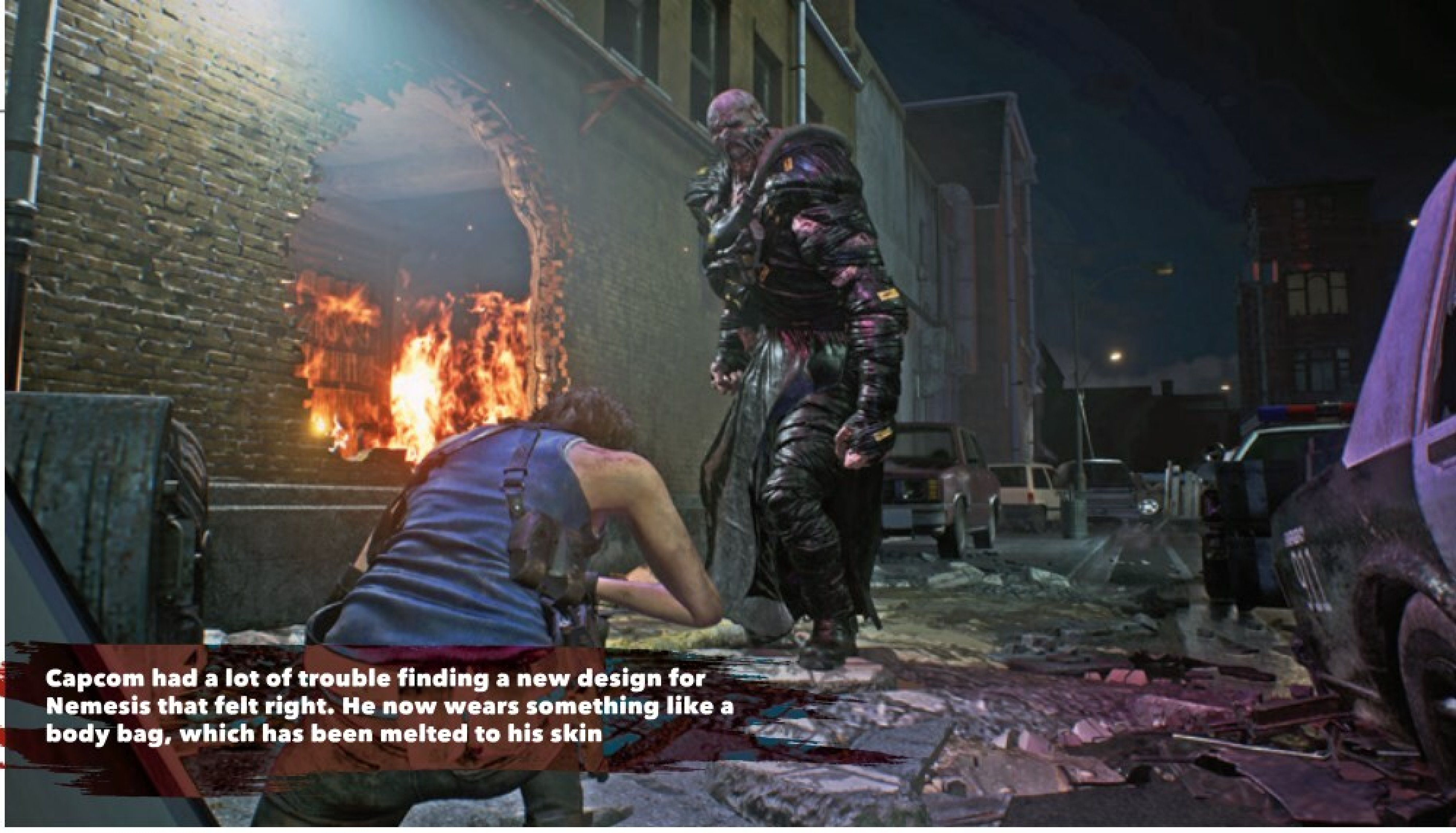


THE TYRANT'S NEW CLOTHES

Jill Valentine might be Resident Evil 3's hero, but since Nemesis is the titular character, Capcom felt that it needed to spend extra time reworking the villain's design. Yonghee Cho is Capcom's art director, and has been working on the series since the development of Resident Evil 7: Biohazard. When Cho started on Resident Evil 3, he knew he had his work cut out for him with Nemesis. Naturally, the art team started by going back to the original concept drawings from the '90s, but they struggled to adapt that design for the modern era.

"It just felt like more of the same, so we went back to the drawing board," Cho says. "The first thing I saw was the clothing. It felt strange to be creating a bioweapon and have it wear clothes. Rather than having him wear clothes, we had him wear something synonymous to a body bag, something that made him feel like a restrained weapon. At the same time, I wanted to stay true to the original, so the silhouette of the Nemesis still has that iconic look."

As the game progresses, not only does Nemesis' arsenal change, but so does his design. At one point, we battle Nemesis atop a construction set. During this battle, Nemesis has a new weapon: a flamethrower. Jill artfully dodges his flame blasts, and then pops off a few attacks of her own. Halfway through this battle, the gas tank on Nemesis' back explodes, but that doesn't faze the monster; he simply marches forward using the flamethrower like a bat. For several minutes, Nemesis' entire body remains on fire. It's a truly awesome sight, and it only ends when Jill escapes. Nemesis is still alive. We know we'll see him again.



Capcom had a lot of trouble finding a new design for Nemesis that felt right. He now wears something like a body bag, which has been melted to his skin

In the original, a well-timed button press allowed Jill to dodge zombie attacks, but this move was notoriously difficult to perform and would sometimes send Jill rolling into the open mouths of her enemies. Dodging in the remake still requires timing, but the move is much more reliable. Additionally, players can now pull on the left trigger while dodging to briefly slow time. This move readies Jill's weapon and snaps her focus to the enemy. When I performed this move perfectly, I was able to squeeze off a few free headshots after every dodge.

The dodge replaces the defensive items features in previous RE remakes, which might disappoint some fans. However, Jill's dodge is a limitless resource, and after sidestepping zombies for hours, I can't imagine navigating Raccoon City's streets without it. In some ways, the dodge makes Resident Evil's action feel more fast-paced, because you dodge and weave between larger groups of enemies, but that only increases the tension of every encounter.

"If you look at the evolution of Resident Evil one, two, and three, one defined survival horror, and two evolved it," says producer Masachika Kawata. "Three was the evolution of the franchise's action. In remaking the third one, we said, 'Okay, this is what the designers strived for in the original installments, so we'll stay true to that philosophy.' We're trying to make sure that we maintain that level of survival horror, but at the same time put the focus on the action."

I get a solid handle on Jill's dodge maneuver as I enter one of Raccoon City's electrical substations. I need to turn the power back on, but the substation is crawling with Rottweiler-sized insects that jump on Jill's head and infect her with parasites. These parasites slowly eat away at Jill's health and, if left untreated, will eventually cause her stomach to explode in a gruesome fountain of organs. Fortunately, I have a healthy stock of green herbs and I dance circles around these bugs with a shotgun. As I leave the substation, I'm feeling fairly capable – like I can take on the world. Then a nearby brick wall shudders and something smashes through from the other side. My stomach lurches as the towering figure moans "STARS" and marches toward me.

"Nemesis is a very, very intense character," Kawata says. "Just in terms of his speed, his power, the variety of weapons that he's able to use. He's not one-note. He offers a lot of variety, and because of that variety, he's a lot more unpredictable, which adds to that level of fear. You don't know what's going to happen next. If you look at his visual design, he exudes intensity."

"When the director saw what they were putting together in RE2 with Mr. X, he was like, 'Wait a minute! You've turned him into a mini Nemesis, so that sets the bar even higher," Fabiano adds. "We were determined to make sure that Nemesis was his own brand of fear and horror, and that he could do things that RE 2's tyrant couldn't."

The comparisons to Resident Evil 2's walking nightmare are apt, since both monsters march forward with relentless purpose and chase players from one environment to the next. RE3's Nemesis is faster and nimbler than Mr. X. As I race for the nearest door, Nemesis leaps over my head to block my escape. I spin and run the other way. I don't even know where I'm going anymore, but I don't want to be here. One of Nemesis' tentacles shoots under my foot, sending me to the ground. I could have dodged that if I was quick enough, but my fingers are trembling and I can't seem to think straight. The last thing I see is the Nemesis' boot racing toward my face.

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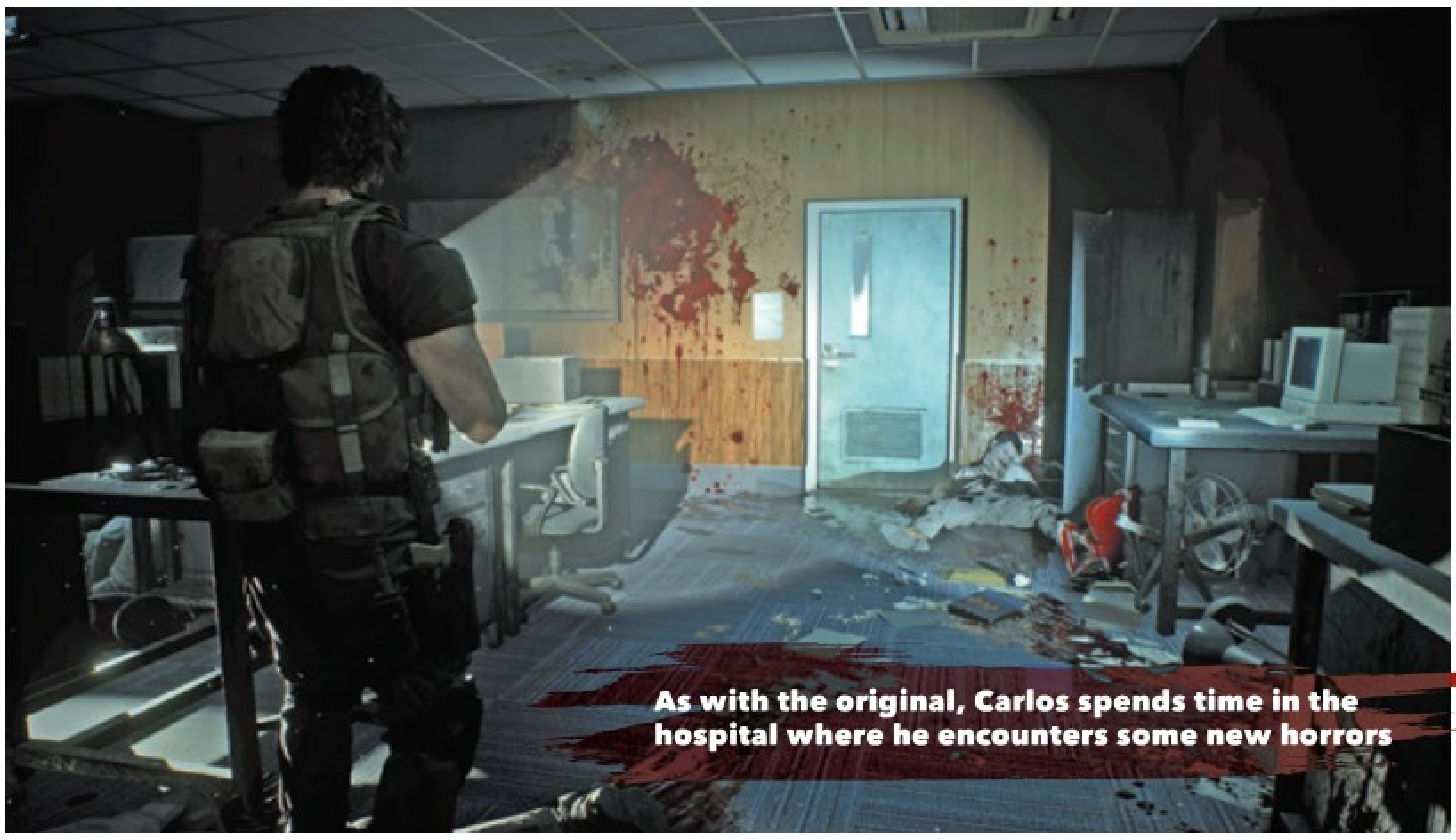


As with the original, Carlos spends time in the hospital where he encounters some new horrors

MEDICAL MALPRACTICE

Jill is Resident Evil 3's primary protagonist, but early on she encounters a group of mercenaries hired by Umbrella's Biohazard Countermeasure Service. These battle-hardened warriors were officially tasked with entering ground zero and rescuing survivors. Carlos Oliveira is the UBCS's heavy weapons specialist, and his mop of shaggy hair and suave attitude belie his capabilities on the battlefield. Jill and Carlos quickly establish an uneasy alliance; Jill is wary of anyone who works for Umbrella, but Carlos is only trying to help people. Still, as the duo battle to escape the city, they discover that some of Carlos's UBCS buddies have ulterior motives that may threaten their survival.

"We wanted to make Carlos feel like a proper partner to Jill, so he feels like someone she can rely on," Fabiano says. "He's someone she can let go and let help out. Someone she can rely on when push comes to shove. That's where we found a balance with the new Carlos. Personally, we love the way he looks, and we hope that you do too."

"If you look at the original design of Carlos, you could say that he had a more easygoing, almost playboy personality," Cho adds. "We wanted to maintain his personality, but at the same time, make sure that the way he interacts with everybody makes sense, given the dire situation. In terms of the hairstyle, we went back to that easygoing nature. He's not going to be too concerned about that stuff, so we're making sure that part of his character is intact."

In the original Resident Evil 3, players took control of Carlos for a brief section about halfway through the game. After a big fight with Nemesis, Jill becomes infected with the T-virus and Carlos races to the hospital to find a cure. Capcom asked us not to talk about how the story differs in the remake, and doesn't want to say if Jill gets infected this time around, but we can say that we played through a hospital sequence as Carlos.

The new hospital is much larger than it was in the original release. The '90s version simply had a handful of zombie-infested rooms that featured a few puzzles. The remake expands the hospital so it is now a network of interlocking rooms, compete with several lock-and-key puzzles that have players slowly opening new areas in a traditional Resident Evil fashion.

Carlos' goal is behind a locked door at the end of one wing of the hospital. This door can only be unlocked with a voice-print ID, so I set off on a scavenger hunt for a vocal recording. I find a key inside a set of lockers that opens a whole new set of previously locked rooms, then I creep down a hall full of blood-stained gurneys and piles of body bags. The hospital is incredibly well-lit, which makes it easy to spot shambling corpses, but the lighting also signifies a shift in philosophy for the series.

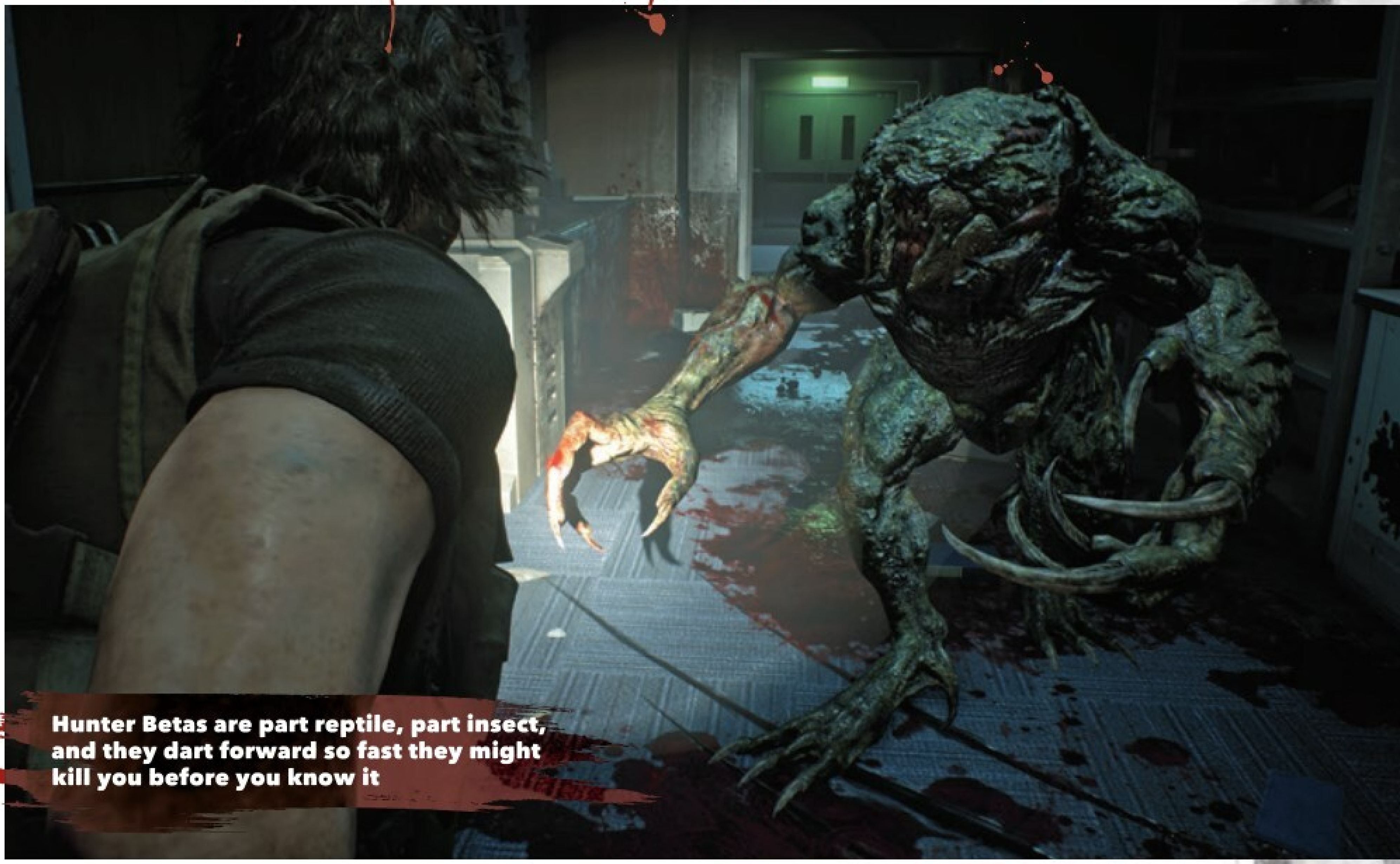
"In previous games, the atmosphere was very dark," Cho says. "We obviously made it that way because we wanted to instill that feeling of fear and make sure that you didn't know what was around every corner. But because this one is a little more action-oriented, I wanted to make sure that you're able to see things, so we thought more about lighting. There are the neon signs in the city, and there are other elements of light so you are able to see the action a little better."

Resident Evil 3 might be well-lit, but it is no less scary. Scattered notes detail the horrors of the hospital staff leading up to the outbreak. One nurse talks about an influx of patients experiencing hyperphagia and limb necrosis. At this point, any patients still wandering the hall are long past the point of recovery. This hospital was once a monument to health and medicine. Now it's a graveyard. Resident Evil 3's atmosphere does a fantastic job of ratcheting up the tension even when you're not fighting enemies.

A NEW PUZZLE BOX

Puzzles have always been a big part of the Resident Evil experience, but many of the original Resident Evil 3's puzzles were outright nonsensical – asking players to slide giant boxes onto pressure plates or fiddle with cogs to adjust the water level in a fountain. For the remake, Capcom has redesigned all the puzzles to better fit the setting. Sadly, Capcom asked us not to describe any puzzles we encountered during our demos, but we can say that we enjoyed what we played and that the puzzles we encountered offer a nice change of pace from Resident Evil 3's action.

"We thought there were some unique puzzles in the original, but this time around we wanted to make them more realistic or believable," says producer Peter Fabiano. "We wanted to make them feel a little fresh, not entirely like they were, so we have reimagined the puzzles. That was part of the goal, to look at the puzzles and bring in something fresh, so if people played the original, now they're coming back and it's not like you know how to solve the same problems."



Hunter Betas are part reptile, part insect, and they dart forward so fast they might kill you before you know it

Inside a waiting room, I find a small horde of zombies waiting to eat my face. Fortunately, Carlos is packing some serious heat. In addition to a handful of grenades and a semi-automatic pistol, Carlos is equipped with an M4A1 carbine assault rifle that tears through walking corpses. In another room, I find a tactical grip that reduces my weapon's recoil, making it more accurate. Weapon upgrades like this one are scattered throughout the game, but they usually require players to do some extra puzzle solving. Daring zombie hunters can also try to take down the Nemesis for bonus rewards and additional weapon mods, but fights are not easy, and the Nemesis always returns after licking his wounds.

As I enter a nurses' station, I begin experimenting with Carlos' dodge mechanic. Like Jill, Carlos can avoid attacks at the last second, but instead of rolling out of danger, Carlos pivots then lunges forward with a wild haymaker that knocks his attackers to the ground. This move also allows Carlos to squeeze off a few extra attacks, and I really appreciate the extra distance the shove puts between Carlos and his foes. As I wind through the hospital, I get in a groove, baiting zombies closer and then knocking them down to buy myself extra time to line up those coveted headshots. Of course, just when I'm beginning to feel comfortable, the game throws a new wrinkle my way.

As I march through the eerie halls of the hospital's second story, something blurs past the corner of my vision. The figure is human-like, but too bulky to be a zombie. I don't have to wait long to get a better look at the creature. In a sequence reminiscent of the original Resident Evil, the camera cuts to the perspective of the monster and I watch it stalk me through the halls of the hospital before finally lunging out of the shadows for my throat. This is a Hunter Beta, another one of Umbrella's sick experiments.

"I wanted to make sure that it was clear that these are not naturally occurring adversaries," Cho says. "These are man-made, artificial creatures. Specifically with the Hunter, if you take a look at the original design, it has a much more humanoid look. This time around, we wanted the Hunters to look almost beast-like, a little bit more feral."

As I face my first Hunter Beta, I stagger back in horror. This beast's claws are drawn and its mandibles flicker eagerly, hungry for my flesh. Part reptile, part insect, the Hunter Beta darts around the room. He's strong and fast, which is a deadly combo, and I unload nearly two magazines of ammo into the monster before he finally collapses. The Hunter Beta is a fearsome foe even in a one-on-one battle, but Hunters will eventually pursue you in packs, which sounds truly unnerving. Capcom tells me that my demo is winding to a close, and I shudder as I imagine the horrors still waiting for me late in the game.

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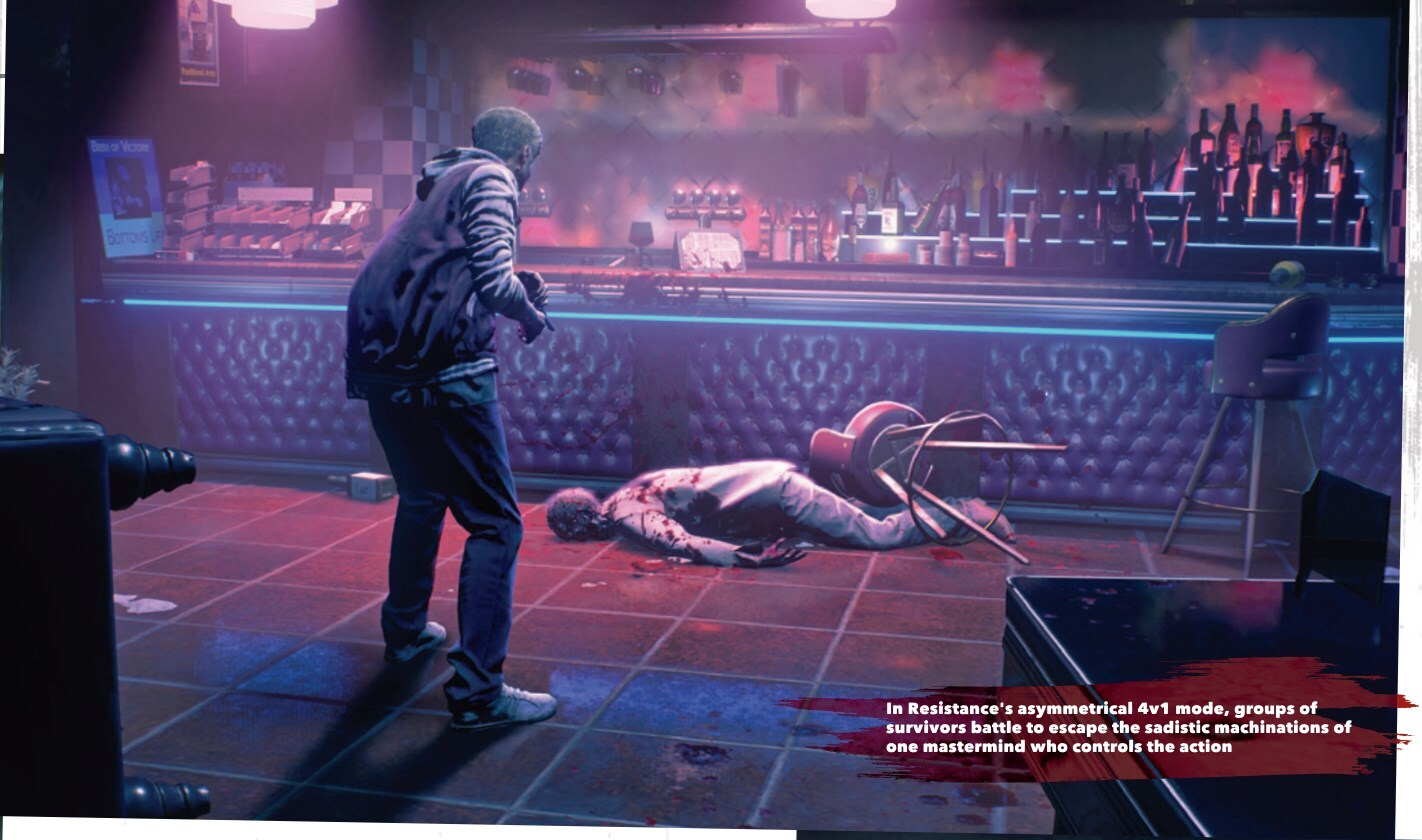
THE PIÈCE DE RESISTANCE

Resident Evil's new multiplayer mode finally gets it right

Resident Evil games have often included secondary modes that encourage replay, such as the high-score challenge of Mercenaries mode. In fact, the recurring Mercenaries mode first appeared in the original Resident Evil 3: Nemesis. For the remake, Capcom wanted to experiment with a new kind of multiplayer mode: an asymmetrical 4v1 mode where a group of survivors battle to escape the sadistic machinations of an Umbrella experiment.

Each match is split into three stages, where the survivors must work together to complete various goals. For example, in one stage players might scavenge the environments for keys to unlock the next area. In another stage, three of the survivors need to protect the fourth who must hack a computer. In the final stage, players can get aggressive as they race across the map and destroy a series of biological experiments. As players complete each stage, they earn Umbrella cash, which can be used to buy new weapons, herbs, and other tools.

All of Resistance's survivors have their own unique skills and abilities. For my first match, I play as the absurdly named Martin Sandwich. Martin might sound like your average teenager, but he is also an engineering genius who can disable traps around the battlefield and use his flash baton to stun oncoming enemies. I use one of Martin's skills to ping the environment, which highlights objects on the map for the rest of my team.



In Resistance's asymmetrical 4v1 mode, groups of survivors battle to escape the sadistic machinations of one mastermind who controls the action

Martin is a good example of a support character, but if you want to be on the front lines, you can play as someone like Samuel Jordan. This young bruiser used to train as a boxer, which makes him an ideal shield for the rest of the team. I love Sam's dash punch, which allows him to quickly close in on zombies. Sam is also skilled in the use of melee weapons, such as bats and sledgehammers, which easily tear through groups of undead monsters.

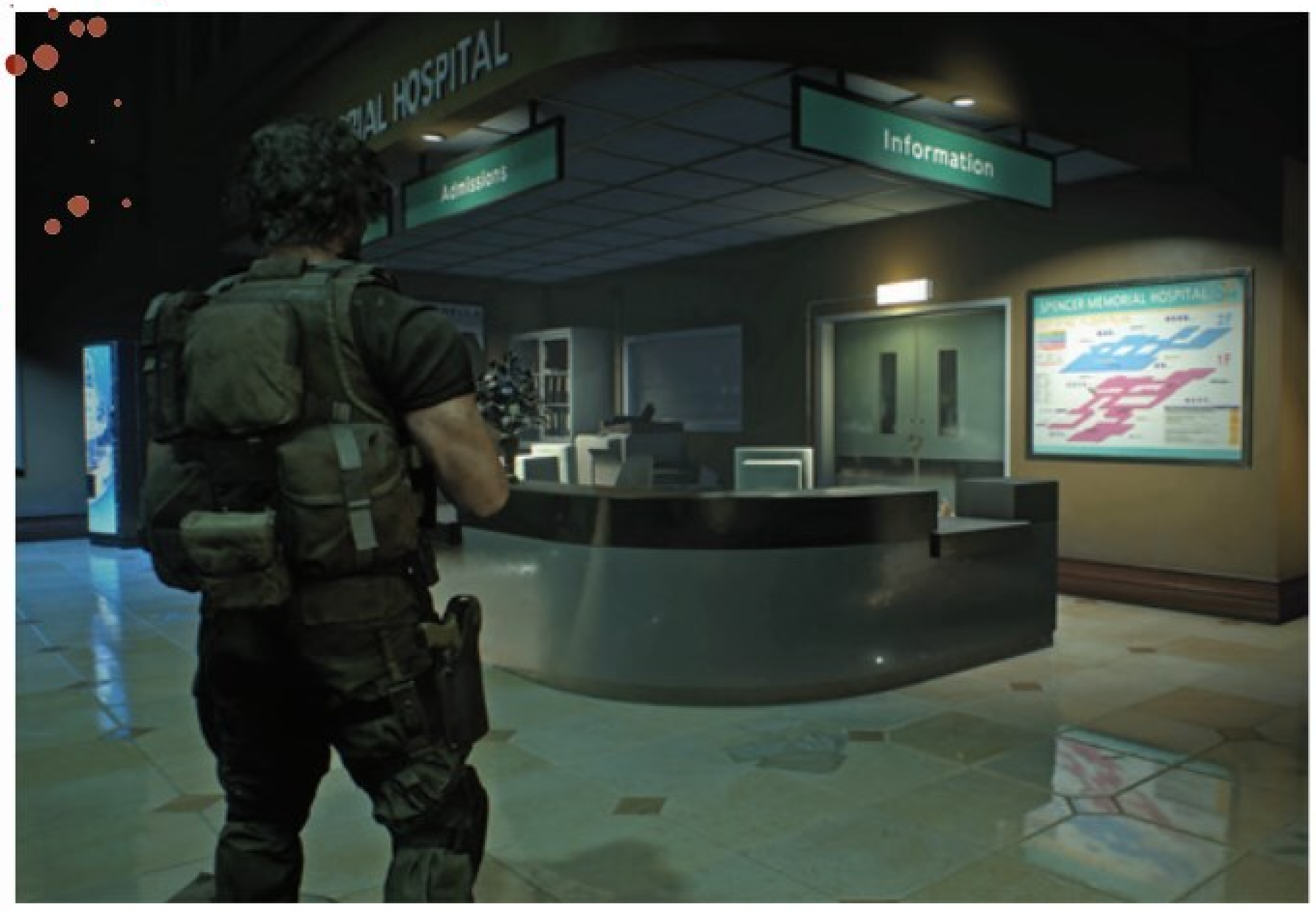
"The fun part of being a survivor is that you get to play as an everyday citizen in Raccoon City," says producer Peter Fabiano. "For those that have played Resident Evil 2 and 3, you'll be familiar with the controls, so it's something that you can jump right into, but you also need to be very collaborative. You need to work together to actually get to your common goal. That's a really fun aspect of the online game because it is still survival horror, but it's, 'What if you're doing survival horror with a bunch of regular guys and girls?'"

The Mastermind, on the other hand, offers a unique type of action that we've never seen in a Resident Evil game before. The mastermind works behind the scenes laying traps to prevent the survivors from escaping before time runs out. Masterminds start with a complete view of the map and can see the location of all the survivors' goals. They are also dealt a hand of random cards, which can be used to summon various monsters or lay trip mines. Masterminds can even get their hands dirty by directly controlling anything they spawn or just watch the chaos unfold from the safety of their control room.

Iconic villains such as Annette Birkin and Ozwell Spencer return for the role of Mastermind. During my turn at the controls, I play as Alex Wesker. I laugh with demented glee as I unleash a small army of zombie dogs on a group of unwitting survivors. Each Mastermind has their own ultimate attack, which allows them to do things like let Tyrants loose on the battlefield or set up deadly laser fields that kill anyone they touch. Alex's ultimate is a monstrous plant, which looks a bit like Plant 42 from the original Resident Evil. This plant's vines whip out in all directions, and it devours two survivors before the others finally subdue my creature.

"There's a lot of strategy involved with Mastermind," Fabiano says. "It's almost as if you were playing as a dev member. You get to be a kind of dungeon master and decide where enemies will spawn, where items should be placed, and how to keep the survivors at bay. This is something brand new to the franchise and is taking elements that people are familiar with, but spinning them in a different way."

The biggest takeaway from my time with Resistance is that survivors have to work together. Those who try to lone-wolf their way through a level are just asking for trouble. Meanwhile, the Mastermind offers a more strategic level of play, but one that I'm actually interested in exploring more when Resident Evil 3 launches. The Resident Evil franchise has experimented with a number of multiplayer game types in the past, but they have rarely made much of an impact. We'll have to wait for the final release to see if Resistance has staying power, but this is the most promising new mode we've seen from the series in a long time.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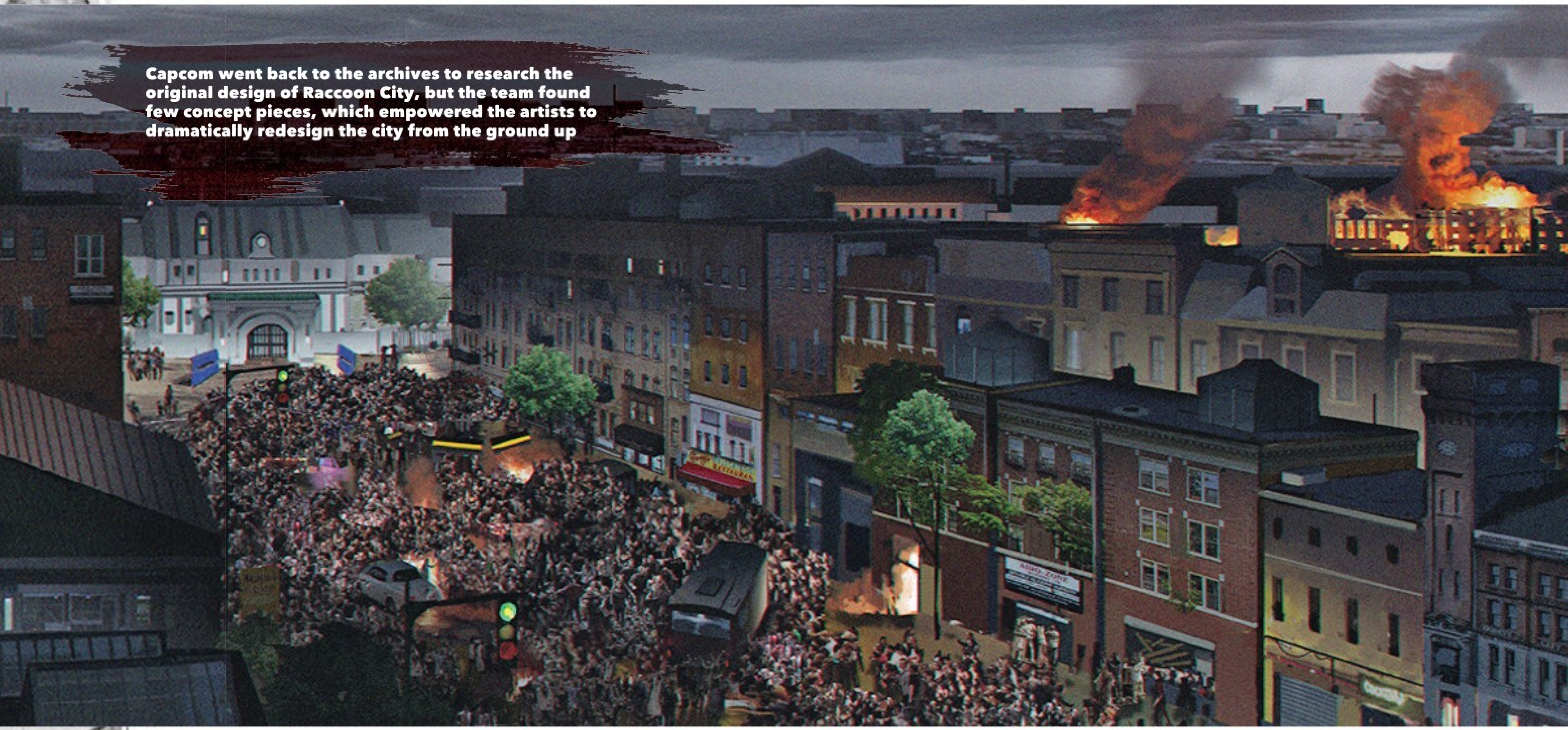
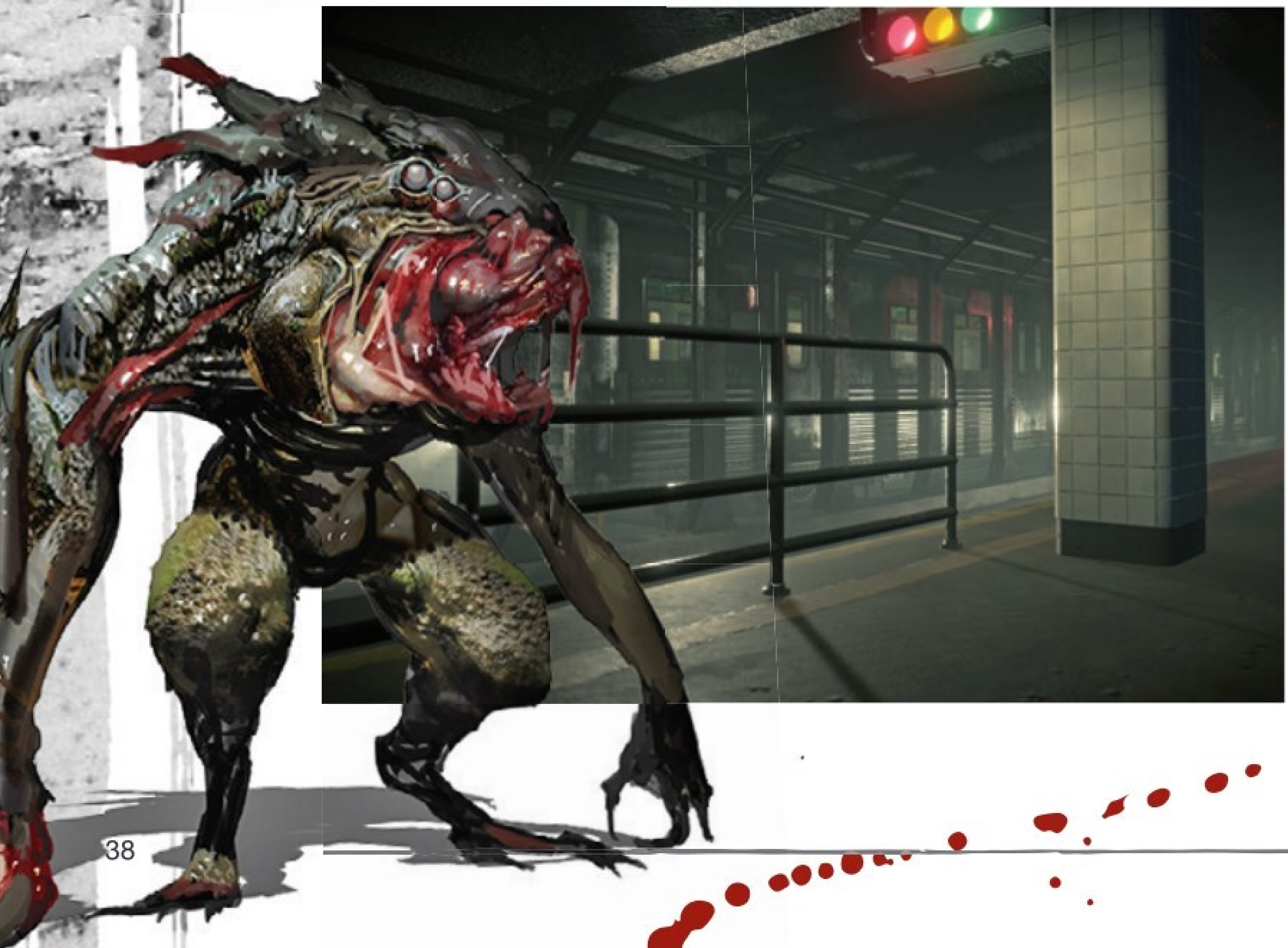


Capcom went back to the archives to research the original design of Raccoon City, but the team found few concept pieces, which empowered the artists to dramatically redesign the city from the ground up



Resident Evil 3 is set around the events of Resident Evil 2, so fans might catch a few references to the previous game, but RE 2 heroes Leon and Claire won't be making any cameos

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THE END OF A TRILOGY

Instead of maturing with age, the original Resident Evil 3 has degraded. The Resident Evil franchise was born in an era of great change for the industry – when developers were still figuring out how players should navigate 3D space. This makes Resident Evil's early adventures a chore to play today. In order to stay relevant, Resident Evil 3 needed a major overhaul, and Capcom seems to have delivered. Based on our time with the game, Capcom stayed faithful to the original concept of delivering an action-packed survival-horror experience, but most of the old game's rough edges have been sanded down. Anyone who fell in love with Capcom's previous RE remakes should be excited for Resident Evil 3.

"We've always looked at RE one, two, and three as its own package, its own trilogy – the Raccoon City story," Fabiano says. "We'd already done a remake of one, so when we decided to do the RE2 remake, we felt that it should be almost one package with RE3. It made sense to keep them close together, almost as one."

Does that mean that Resident Evil 3 is the last of the RE remakes? Would Capcom ever consider a remake of the beloved Resident Evil 4 or other offshoots, such as the original Dreamcast hit Resident Evil – Code: Veronica? Unfortunately, Capcom isn't ready to officially comment on the possibility of projects like these.

"I can't really speak to the future of the series, but I do think that developers love challenging themselves and trying new things and new ideas that make things fresh," Fabiano says. "Keeping a creative vision is important."

"We understand that the classics were received very well, and there is a demand from the fans," Kawata adds. "We have heard fans requesting a remake of these titles for a very long time. We understand how much the classics are beloved, and we want to make sure that we reach that same level of quality when remaking these titles, which is why we end up pouring all these resources and energy into them. At this point, we're just trying to make sure that we're putting everything we can into making sure Resident Evil 3 successfully comes out."

The idea of future Resident Evil remakes may tantalize fans, but for the time being, Resident Evil 3 offers plenty of reasons to be happy. Like last year's Resident Evil 2 remake, this year's entry successfully modernizes Resident Evil's combat and core exploration loop while ratcheting up the tension and atmosphere that fans love about the series. Resident Evil 3 may be one of the more forgotten entries in the franchise, but Capcom has done everything in its power to ensure that it's never overlooked again. ◈

LE

» PLATFORM
PC

» STYLE
10-Player
Online Shooter

» PUBLISHER
Riot Games

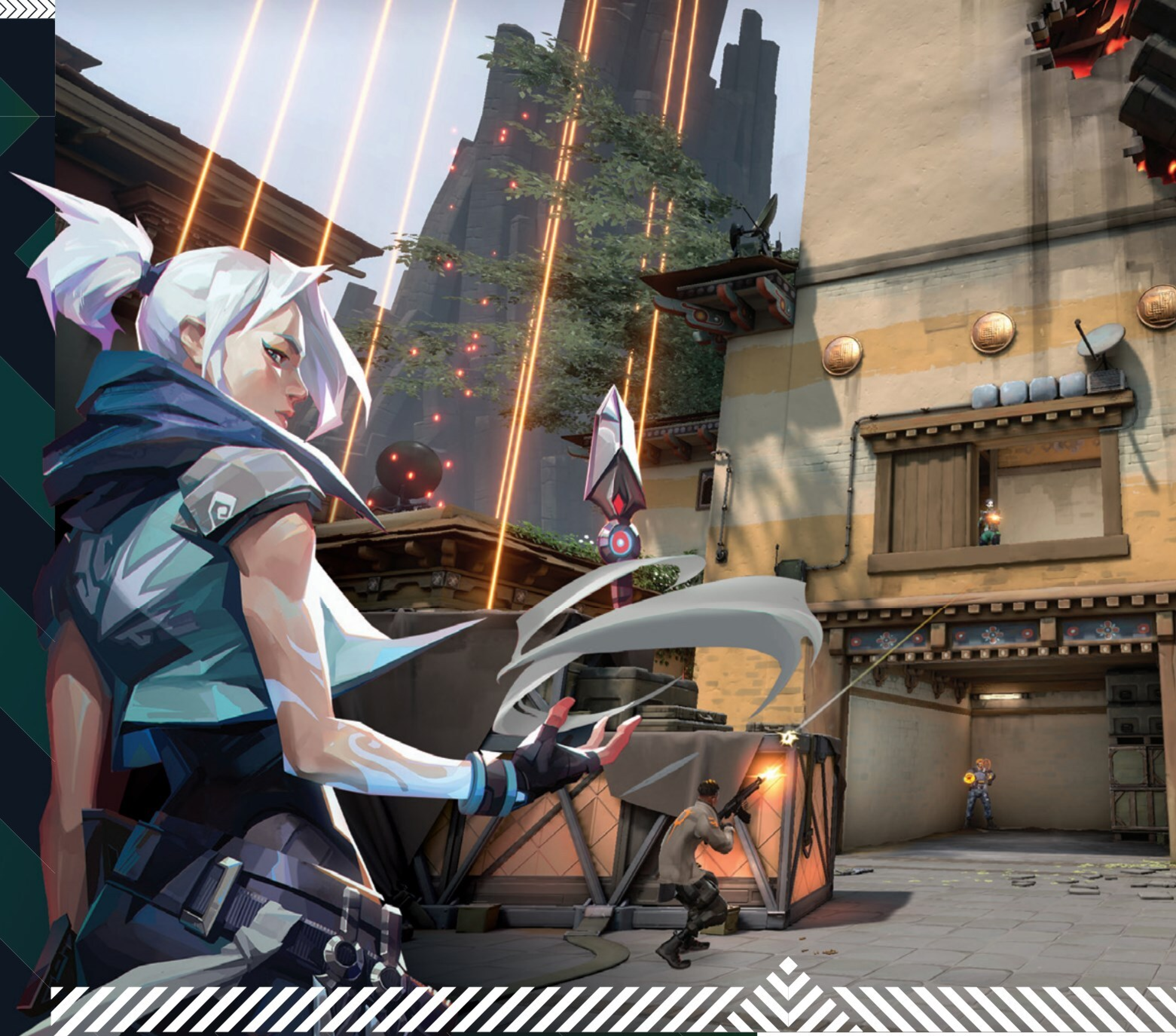
» DEVELOPER
Riot Games

» RELEASE
Summer

A AGUE OF ITS OWN

***League of Legends* studio Riot Games pulls back the curtain on its upcoming tactical hero shooter, Valorant**

by Brian Shea



Last October, when Riot Games announced a slate of new titles, one of the outliers was Project A, a first-person shooter that combines the popular hero-based shooter genre with tactical gameplay. We now know Project A is officially called Valorant, and will launch on PC this summer as a free-to-play title. I traveled to Santa Monica, California, to spend a day in the offices of Riot Games to not only learn about the upcoming shooter from all angles, but also play it for several hours.

TELLING THE TALE

While most of the games revealed during Riot's 10-year-anniversary stream are set in the League of Legends universe, Valorant is unique in that it does not feature any connection to Riot's juggernaut IP. Instead, Valorant takes place on a version of Earth in the near future following an event known as First Light. This event spans the entire globe, leading to big transformations to life, technology, and how governments operate. However, select people across the globe start to gain abilities stemming from this massive event. These gifted individuals are called Radiants.

In response to First Light, a shadow organization founds the Valorant Protocol, which pulls together Agents from all over the world. These Agents consist of Radiants and other individuals equipped with Radiant technology. Due to the backstories of these characters, the Valorant team features interesting dynamics

as the individuals not only sometimes know each other, but they also come from a wide spectrum of backgrounds ranging from crime to the military.

Despite this intriguing setup to the universe, the development team wants to be subtle in the way it approaches storytelling. "I've worked in story-driven games and I've worked on games similar to this, and I've seen where you can over-invest in a certain area at the expense of the other areas," says creative director David Nottingham. "I'm a big believer that world building is about creating a foundation; you don't build the whole house and go, 'Here it is, it's done. No one can make any changes.' You build a strong foundation that then over time as you want to go, 'Oh let's set this part here' or 'Let's take this character in this direction because that seems interesting.' You have that flexibility to grow."

Coordinating with your team is essential for victory

TACTICAL INSPIRATIONS

When you think of hero-based shooting games, names like Overwatch and Team Fortress 2 likely pop into your head. With Valorant, Riot acknowledges those successful titles through the character appearances and abilities, but instead draws heavier inspiration from games like Counter-Strike, Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, Rainbow Six Siege, and CrossFire.

"A lot of what we drew from our inspiration for wanting to discover this space was this idea of playing these old-school tactical shooter games," says game director Joe Ziegler. "In a lot of cases, what we really focused on was the team play, and that tight, tense gameplay that occurs inside these spaces – their special sauce, if you will, in this particular genre. We wanted to bring it out in a way that felt like would really bring it into a service era, bring it into a modernization era, bring it into a space where it could continuously grow and expand, and be something creative that would flourish with an audience."

By leaning into those inspirations, Riot is delivering something that veers closer to Counter-Strike than Overwatch. Players engage in tactical, team-based gameplay with no in-round respawns and high lethality. Two teams of five players select from a pool of distinct Agents and battle it out over the course of several rounds. The only mode in Valorant at the moment revolves around one team defending multiple points from an attacking team trying to plant and detonate an explosive spike. If the 100-second round timer expires or the spike is defused after being planted, the defending team gets a point, while a successful detonation earns the attacking squad a point, with the first team to win the best of 24 rounds getting the victory. Either team can also take a round by wiping the other team out.

"The other thing that was important for this game was having incredibly high stakes," executive producer Anna Donlon. "You definitely get those moments of feeling like you're the last player standing and you've got to pull it off without any of your teammates with you, or even worse, you're the first one dead and having to watch your team try to pull it off without you."

Riot worked to create a game where team play is not just encouraged; it's all but essential. Playing as a lone wolf or performing a clutch play isn't impossible, but it's certainly more difficult than games where characters are more like bullet sponges. Valorant doesn't force you to play as a team, but rather it makes players want to since that's the easiest path to victory.

GETTING TO THE POINT

From the start of my gameplay session, I witness just how important the team dynamic is. My team and I load into Bind, the first of two maps available in the build we're playing. Bind takes a traditional tactical multiplayer map and removes the middle lane. Instead, you have two branching paths that require you to coordinate with your team to determine who's heading to what objective. I choose Sova, the Russian archer, as my Agent – since I've played a ton of Overwatch, his Recon Bolt ability feels immediately similar to Hanzo's Sonic Arrow. With a working understanding of how the character's primary ability works, I'm raring to test it in the field.

However, before the action starts, we enter the Buy Phase. During this time, you can purchase different guns, shields, and even abilities for your selected Agent. All Agents choose from the same pool of weapons – no matter which character you're playing, you have a pistol by default, and can buy everything from SMGs to shotguns, automatic rifles, and sniper rifles. Obviously, the better guns cost more, but you can also choose to save and carry your money into the next round. I decide to do just that, opting to simply bring my default pistol into battle this first round.

My team starts on attack, so we decide to rush point A. The opposing team notices this, but not quickly enough; they only sent two defenders to point A, and we make fast work of them. Unfortunately for us, Bind has two one-way teleporters to make up for the lack of a middle lane. While we have the point to ourselves, I drop to one knee and plant the spike. Now my team must defend it against the remaining enemies who hope to defuse it.

By using a combination of the direct paths from B to A and the teleporter, the enemy team descends upon our point from multiple angles. One of my teammates is picked off as smoke orbs flood the objective. I turn around to check a corner, only to be the next victim of the proficient marksman. Since our Sage's Resurrection ultimate isn't yet charged, I have no choice but to watch the numbers dwindle as the underpowered enemy team quickly evens the odds and takes the advantage amidst the chaos of the firefight. The defenders come back from a disastrous start to wipe our team and claim the first round.

Between rounds, you enter another Buy Phase. This time, any money you saved last round carries over, with additions granted based on your performance. I decide to stop messing around with the weak default pistol and upgrade to a nice automatic rifle, as well as a Shock Bolt for Sova's bow.

As the round starts, we rush point A once again, but we're not the only ones more well-equipped this round. I'm immediately sniped, leaving my team a man down for the rest of the round. Thankfully, the other people on my team aren't playing the game for the first time, and they manage to turn it around and plant the spike with one enemy remaining. That last remaining enemy makes the strategic call to hightail it out of there; if you survive a round, your weapon carries into the next round, so you can save money and still have a good weapon. Because we won the round, I still get a good amount of cash, which I use to purchase the Guardian, a semi-automatic rifle that becomes my go-to weapon when I need a utility option.

As I mentioned before, team play is essential, and lone-wolfing is rarely a good idea, but when your team is gone and you're the last player standing, you have a choice to make: fight or flight. My chance to prove myself comes as a Brimstone ult takes out two of my teammates, and the other two are shotgunned down. It's 3v1 in the enemy team's favor, but I'm not ready to give up just yet. While they search for me to achieve the wipe, I sneak behind one player and take him down with a single shot to the head. Unfortunately for me, their two remaining teammates are near enough to hear the shot and converge on the action. I use my Recon Bolt to spot one of them through a wall and take them out, but the final enemy comes around the corner and guns me down to secure the round.

With a restrictive timer, confined maps, and quick kills, rounds breeze by. However, due to the high round count consisting of a best-of-24 format, matches take a considerable amount of time. As we approach the final Buy Phase before halftime, the characters remark that we lose all our money after this round, so our team splurges on the heavy machine gun, Odin. We all equip Odin and heavy shields and push point B. The defenders also have strong shields and expensive guns, but they aren't prepared for the all-out, coordinated blitz we brought their way, and we easily take the point.

Following that statement win, the economy resets, we switch sides, and now my team is on defense. While offensive strategies often required us to choose a point and send most of us there on attack (with occasional fake outs), being the defenders requires a bit more strategy as you must

monitor all points and try to notice and react to the offense's commitment.

The build I played only featured two maps that approach tactical multiplayer level design in unique ways. Bind, the map previously described, demonstrates what happens if you remove the middle lane and add teleporters. Haven, the second map I played, shows the opposite of what happens when there's not only a middle lane, but it's super important because it has an objective on it. The result is even more splintering of the team on defense, with a more traditional flow between points since there are more paths and no teleporters.

When Valorant launches, it will feature just four maps, including the two I played. The team is still figuring out the cadence at which it will release future maps (and characters, for that matter), but Riot insists it's in service of both producing high-quality maps and making sure players can learn the smaller stable of maps and characters without feeling overwhelmed.

Unlike other hero shooters, you can equip any gun to any character in Valorant

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

One of the biggest pushes Riot is making with Valorant is giving everyone an equal chance of success so that players are excelling based on skill rather than gaming the system. One key component for this initiative is Riot Direct, a global network started by Riot in 2014 to help gamers to lower their ping by choosing the most efficient route for the player data through the ISP networks.

At launch, Riot is aiming to give at least 70 percent of players less than 35 millisecond ping and host all games on dedicated 128-tick servers. Not only that, but all player movement is upsampled to 128 frames per second to compensate for lag; if an enemy player is lagging due to poor connectivity, their movement will still appear smooth on your screen. These advancements hope to solve problems often associated with online titles, including peeker's advantage, where because of small delays in the data reaching the other player, an attacking player peeking around a wall can sometimes see and shoot a defending player before they can react.

Additionally, Riot is working on innovative ways to counteract cheaters and hackers in Valorant. The efforts begin with Riot's Vanguard cheat detection system used in League of Legends. This proprietary system catches cheaters using a living list of detection methods, then instantly ends games where cheaters are found and bans the cheater. In addition, all Valorant matches are server-authoritative, meaning that players can't trick the server with things like speed or teleportation hacks. Finally, Riot is instituting a new fog of war system to battle wallhacks. This system omits enemy locations on players' systems until just before they enter each other's line of sight.

While Riot has shown a commitment to using technically proficient methods to combat common problems for online shooters, the studio says players don't need to be as high-tech to enjoy Valorant. Riot plans on rewarding players who have access to powerful machines by delivering 144 frames per second or even better, but the studio says players can get 30 frames per second on far lesser rigs. Obviously, better machines will provide better experiences, and in turn, potentially give competitive edges to those players, but Riot is working to design ways to give players with lower-tech setups all the help they need to find the culprit, whether it's an old network adapter or a slow internet connection.

A PUSH TOWARD LAUNCH

Though this is the first real information released about Valorant since its announcement as Project A last October, fans don't have long to wait before they can get their hands on Riot's new shooter. Riot tells me it's currently targeting a summer launch, with a pre-launch closed beta test coming prior to that. While 12 heroes and four maps might not sound like a lot, Riot is committed to supporting Valorant over the course of several years, just as it has done with League of Legends.

With a minimal cost of entry, unique twists on familiar gameplay, and a massive built-in fan base for the developer, the sky is the limit for Valorant. It will be interesting to see how players embrace Riot's attempt at stepping into an already-crowded genre, but as it stands, Valorant is off to a great start.

WASTELAND 3

» PLATFORM
PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» STYLE
1 to 2-Player Role-Playing (2-Player Online)

» PUBLISHER
inXile Entertainment, Deep Silver

» DEVELOPER
inXile Entertainment

» RELEASE
May 19

A WILD

RIDE through COLORADO

by
DANIEL TACK

The Wasteland titles have always been surreal excursions that dive into the depths and dregs of what humanity is capable of when faced with an ultimate disaster. After its humble beginnings in 1988, the franchise returned after a successful Kickstarter in 2014, right when classic-style PC RPGs were experiencing a renaissance. Each entry deals with survival after a nuclear-driven apocalypse; Wasteland 3, which continues directly after the events of Wasteland 2, is no exception.

The latest entry taps into the franchise's roots and provides a new post-apocalyptic playground in the frigid wastes of Colorado. Recently, I visited InXile in Newport Beach, Calf., to spend some time with the game and prepare for a future full of grim survival, horrifying mutations, and even a crazy drug-operation boss who thinks he's Santa Claus.

COLORADO SPRINGS
CITY LIMIT

CHOICES, CHOICES, CHOICES

Your noble group of do-gooder Rangers arrive in Colorado only to find that, like many other locations in the US, it's no longer a safe or sane place to explore. After a deadly scrap with some insurgents, it's clear what the score is in Denver. You must rebuild and survive, and how you go about it is up to you. Your decisions carry weight, causing different scenarios and endings to play out.

One of your core choices comes down to how you want to interact with what is considered the ruling family of Colorado. You can side with the Patriarch, a no-nonsense control nut who believes in protecting the people, but there's a decidedly hard edge to his policies. Perhaps you opt to side with one of his errant children; Liberty, Valor, and Victory all have bones to pick with dad in some form or another. You also could just burn the whole thing down, go on a murderous rampage across Colorado, and end up dead exploring some forbidden areas on the map. Choices are everywhere.

Your first decision begins before you even start playing. You pick two starting characters and can select from a variety of premade pairs or handcraft your own, each with their own stats, perks, and quirks. A lot of customization is available here, including options to make your characters play well off the beaten path. For instance, you can make them dependent on drugs, meaning they need to constantly take more to keep their performance levels high. Non-combat soft skills change the game as well, like being a "hard-ass" or "kiss-ass" when negotiating. Beginners or players that want to get right into the action can pick a preset combo that has complementary perks, like a mentor/student. You can also significantly alter your characters' appearance and voice.

After opting for a pair that focuses on shotgun and pistol play and "get in there" skills, I'm ready to start my journey, which begins right after a vicious opening ambush on the Rangers. In what functions as a tutorial, the turn-based combat is familiar for lovers of Wasteland 2 and tactical RPGs. However, I immediately notice an awesome difference: I can see my chance to hit the opponent before I move. Because of that, I can highlight a wide variety of move options and see what my chance to hit is going to be before committing.

The game is fully voiced, so I hear plenty of psychotic bandit quips as I move through the introductory stage, looting, scooting around, and taking advantage of the environment. My assailants hang around gas tanks and other objects in this mission, so I make quick work of an entire gang of enemies by tricking them into milling about an explosive and then popping a round into it.

Even in this early segment, I experience the constant theme of choice and consequence. In order to save a friendly character, I let an enemy flee, but that allows her to warn her friends in the next area, making my life more difficult for the next encounter. However, if I would have let the threatened character die, she's out of the game forever – a woman I could potentially have numerous interactions with over the course of the game, and her absence could cause ripple effects with other characters.

After a bit more tactical shooting and looting, I meet up with the big bad of the area, a bandit leader who shows off some of the new cinematic-style encounters. These lofty zoom-ins on characters are where you can check out all their exaggerated movements and emotions as they weave through a dialogue tree with you. Depending on your choices, different things can happen, but in this encounter my foe's endless monologue is interrupted by his brains being splattered across the screen via a friendly sniper. So far, I'm impressed by the flash and polish that's been added to the familiar Wasteland experience, both in and out of combat situations.

SAILING AROUND IN THE SNOW

One of the biggest new additions is the Kodiak. This all-terrain mini tank is at your side for your entire journey through Colorado. Instead of clicking around a map and then seeing what happens to the team, you drive all around Colorado in your customizable, upgradeable vehicle in real time. Not only is it your means of transportation, the Kodiak takes a significant role in combat both as a potent weapon and movable cover. Run over opponents, create cover during an advance, or blow opponents away with a variety of weapon add-ons and modifications, including a freeze ray. You can also acquire critical defensive and utility upgrades, like something to reduce the effects of radiation on your crew as you explore the more dangerous areas of the Colorado wilderness.

Theoretically, the world is your oyster as soon as you step into the Kodiak. You can go anywhere right at the beginning of the game, although you are likely to have a bad time should you push into some of the more irradiated and dangerous areas right away. Instead, you get some gentle guidance – the areas along the freeway are safer and the offroad content in Aspen and other radioactive areas serve as reminders that you're entering dangerous territory. If the radiation wasn't enough, there's also a roving boss Scorpitron that lurks in the darker areas of the map and can absolutely devastate even the most powerful squads.

Exposure to the radiation can inflict nausea and a variety of other debilitating effects on your characters that can be healed in safe areas. Some mutations may give your characters advantages or perks, so flirting with fallout to try to gain some valuable mutations on your crew could be a viable strategy. Whether you're on the road or off it, there's always a chance for random encounters with enemies like bandits or non-battle interactions as you roll across the snow.

CHOOSE YOUR SIDE

A variety of factions populate Colorado, each with their own goals and ideas. These factions are loaded with flavor and story. The Gippers is the first one I encounter – a group of doomsday preppers who survived in their bunkers with a lot of Reagan-era propaganda. Upon making their claim on Colorado, they were gifted with a giant Reagan-robot statue that can shoot lasers from its eyes. These communist-hating, Reagan-robot-statue-worshippers have a fully fleshed-out story that's worth experiencing for yourself, so I won't spoil anything. Fun tidbit: They don't actually know what communists are – only that Reagan didn't like them.

Suffice to say, the team has injected an absurd amount of character, depth, and lore into this fully realized Reagan society. In my demo, I get a quick introduction, allowing for interaction with one of the Reagan-monikered Nancys, sort of an honorific in Gipper society, who worship the Reagan statue. The Gippers are bizarre and incredibly compelling to investigate, from their culture to the sacred server room where the statue's A.I. is housed.

The next faction I spend time with are robots from a commune that's been created in Denver International Airport. The DIA is the subject of infinite conspiracy theories and mystery, including a set of chilling murals, underground tunnels, and a towering blue demon horse that you see in this renovated location. The communist robots are attempting to help humans rebuild, as most are sympathetic to the plight, but there's always a catch, with a few offshoots that don't really care for non-robots. Upon arrival at the DIA, you are likely to be able to explore the airport at your leisure, assuming your previous game actions allow it. They have a special doctor that's willing to hook you up with healing and treatment for your "human data," some side games you can play (think Rock'Em Sock'Em Robots), and even a party bot that brings the fun with him. If you're lucky you may even find a way to get the party bot to join your crew.

There are some other experiences and battles to be had in the DIA, including a lot of potential interaction with the Gippers if you choose to side with them (they hate those robot commies!). However, the big highlight for many will be reporting to the machine intelligence tower inside the airport. While it's technically a commune without a real leader, the tower is the next closest thing, and it's been watching you the entire game. Every action you have with a robot or machine is logged, and you are judged for them here should you seek an audience.

These major hubs house just a few of the factions. Numerous one-off experiences are also available outside in the wastelands. These aren't necessarily tied to a greater force, like a Clown Museum full of dangerous clowns with a secret, or a drug lab run by Santa Claus and his team of elf slaves that he's ruling over with an iron fist.

Wasteland 3 has the important choices, dark comedy, and surreal insanity that have come to define the post-apocalyptic series. While there are plenty of in-jokes and nods to its predecessors, if this is your first rodeo with the Rangers, don't be concerned – no prior knowledge of the series is necessary. There's plenty here for those looking for a new RPG where your choices matter. I know I'm looking forward to crewing up with a ragtag band of brawlers and cleaning up Colorado in May. ◆

ANOTHER CHANCE TO TAKE YOUR HEART

HOW PERSONA 5 ROYAL HOPES TO DELIVER THE DEFINITIVE VERSION OF THE BELOVED RPG

BY BRIAN SHEA

» **PLATFORM**
PS4

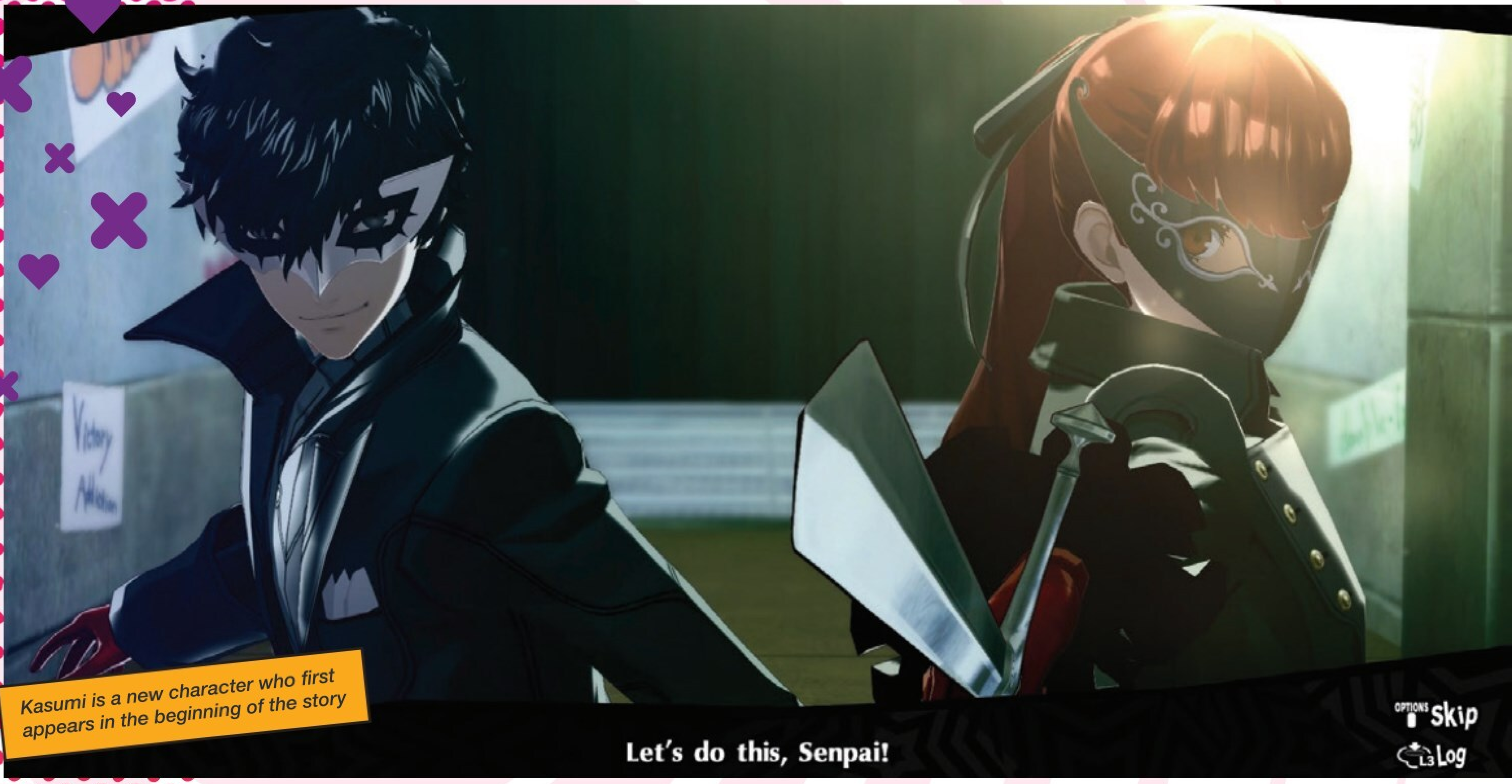
» **STYLE**
1-Player
Role-Playing

» **PUBLISHER**
Atlus

» **DEVELOPER**
Atlus

» **RELEASE**
March 31

In 2017, Atlus released one of the most celebrated RPGs of the decade. Persona 5 not only furthered the series' sterling reputation, but it helped the franchise crack into the mainstream in unprecedented ways with some of the best turn-based combat, dungeon crawling, and social interactions of the series. Now, just as it did with Persona 4 Golden nearly a decade ago, Atlus is releasing a definitive version called Persona 5 Royal. Royal adds myriad new elements both major and minor in hopes of giving newcomers and returning players alike the best way to experience this excellent RPG. I recently got a hands-on look at these additions to see how they impact the game.



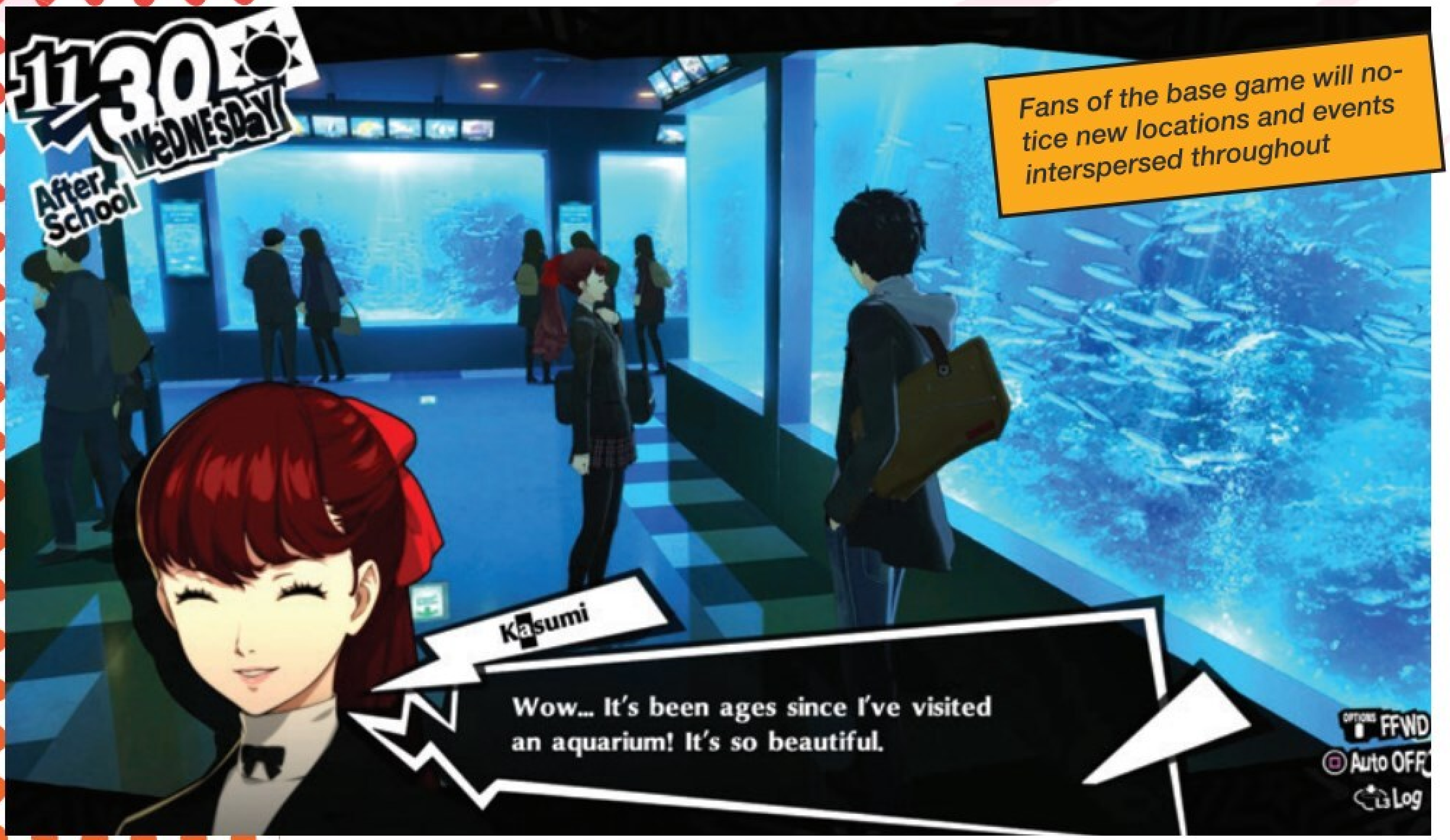
Let's do this, Senpai!

Kasumi is a new character who first appears in the beginning of the story

SHOW ME YOUR TRUE FORM

With Persona 4 Golden, Atlus took the exceptional original version and added new gameplay, social links, and even a new dungeon and boss fight. Just like with P4G, the majority of the content in Persona 5 Royal is the same as the base game. However, following the original's launch, the team at Atlus continued working on ways to improve the already well-liked RPG to create a version it considers to be the best way to play Persona 5. In doing so, Atlus added new characters, areas, and story arcs. While those play out over the course of the lengthy main story, a full new semester is also available after completing the original narrative. All told, Atlus says players can expect around 30 hours of new content in this enhanced version.

In addition to the massive amount of new content centered on the additional semester, other changes are scattered from the beginning of the story. For instance, as the protagonist is arriving at Shujin Academy as a transfer student, so is Kasumi, an all-new character with her own special arc. Kasumi even joins the Phantom Thieves at one point as an additional party member. Unfortunately, I didn't see Kasumi in action, but I did get a glimpse at how other new elements permeate the experience and revitalize familiar moments.



Kasumi

Wow... It's been ages since I've visited an aquarium! It's so beautiful.

Fans of the base game will notice new locations and events interspersed throughout

INFILTRATING EXISTING ELEMENTS

My hands-on demo begins in the first palace, themed after the twisted mind of Shujin Academy's perverted volleyball coach, Suguru Kamoshida. While the palace is largely unchanged, a few newly introduced elements make the experience feel fresh. After defeating a powerful Heavenly Punisher, a large group of Shadows surrounds the Phantom Thieves. Thankfully, Joker is now equipped with a grappling hook, which can be used in palaces for traversal and further exploration. He uses the grappling hook to escape to higher ground.

After jumping across ledges, I notice a grapple point above a door overgrown with ivy on the other side of a gap. At the request of the prompt on my screen, I tap L1 to clear the gap and cut away the ivy to proceed into a secret room. In that room, I find a Will Seed, which is the manifestation of a palace ruler's concentrated cognition. These optional collectibles now appear in new rooms in palaces, and each palace holds three Will Seeds. When you collect one, your team recovers a small amount of SP. If you collect all three in a palace, they can be turned into powerful equipment. As I continue toward the big encounter against Kamoshida, I spot another series of grapple points leading to another Will Seed. It turns out this grappling hook comes in handy. I love being able to explore even more nooks and crannies, and I'm excited to see what new paths and rewards come my way in the other palaces.

I finally reach the boss battle with

Kamoshida, which retains his utterly grotesque form from the original Persona 5. This time, rather than just having Shadow Ann by his side prior to the battle, Kamoshida summons Shadow versions of Mishima and Shiho, two other Shujin Academy students affected by Kamoshida's authoritarian reign of terror. When these minions are next to Kamoshida, he can perform a deadly Killshot attack. I take them out before refocusing on Kamoshida, neutralizing his most menacing ability. These cameos from Mishima and Shiho are brief, but they add an additional wrinkle to the Kamoshida battle and deepen the sense of torment the demented coach inflicted on the students.

While Kamoshida is the only boss encounter in my time with Persona 5 Royal, other boss battles and palaces feature new elements as well, giving several battles all-new twists to make them different from their prior versions. However, if you're looking for something completely new, Persona 5 Royal delivers on that front as well.

REVEALING ITS OTHER SELF

After securing a victory over Kamoshida, I jump to a different save file where I hop on the Inogami train line to Kichijoji, a completely new area of Tokyo you can explore in your spare time. I head there alongside Ryuji, with whom I explore the various shops and attractions. I'm not really in the market for anything, but I poke my head in a few shops to find some hats and pens that would make great gifts, and expensive crystals that can be used as equipment. I don't have any need for these items right now (nor do I have the money to buy them), but I make a mental note to come back later.

After exploring a few shops, I head to Penguin Sniper, a darts and billiards lounge. I play a game of darts with Ryuji, which strengthens our bond and levels up Joker's Baton Pass to him. While the game of darts in this first scene isn't interactive, you can return to play an actual darts minigame. Before we leave the lounge, Ryuji remarks that we should bring the whole team there to have some fun, and Morgana says we should come back at night.

Upon the conclusion of the scene, I return to Café Leblanc for the evening, where Mishima texts Joker about a dangerous man causing trouble in Kichijoji. After the conversation, Morgana seems determined to handle the problem and the side mission is added to the list of Phantom Thieves' mementos requests. Unfortunately, I didn't have a ton of time to explore Kichijoji to fully grasp how much there is to do there, but I did return with the whole crew to shoot some pool and raise my charm attribute. Between the side missions and places (e.g., the darts and billiards lounge) providing extra social opportunities, I'm excited for what this new area of Kichijoji could potentially bring to Persona 5.

A PLACE TO STORE YOUR TREASURES

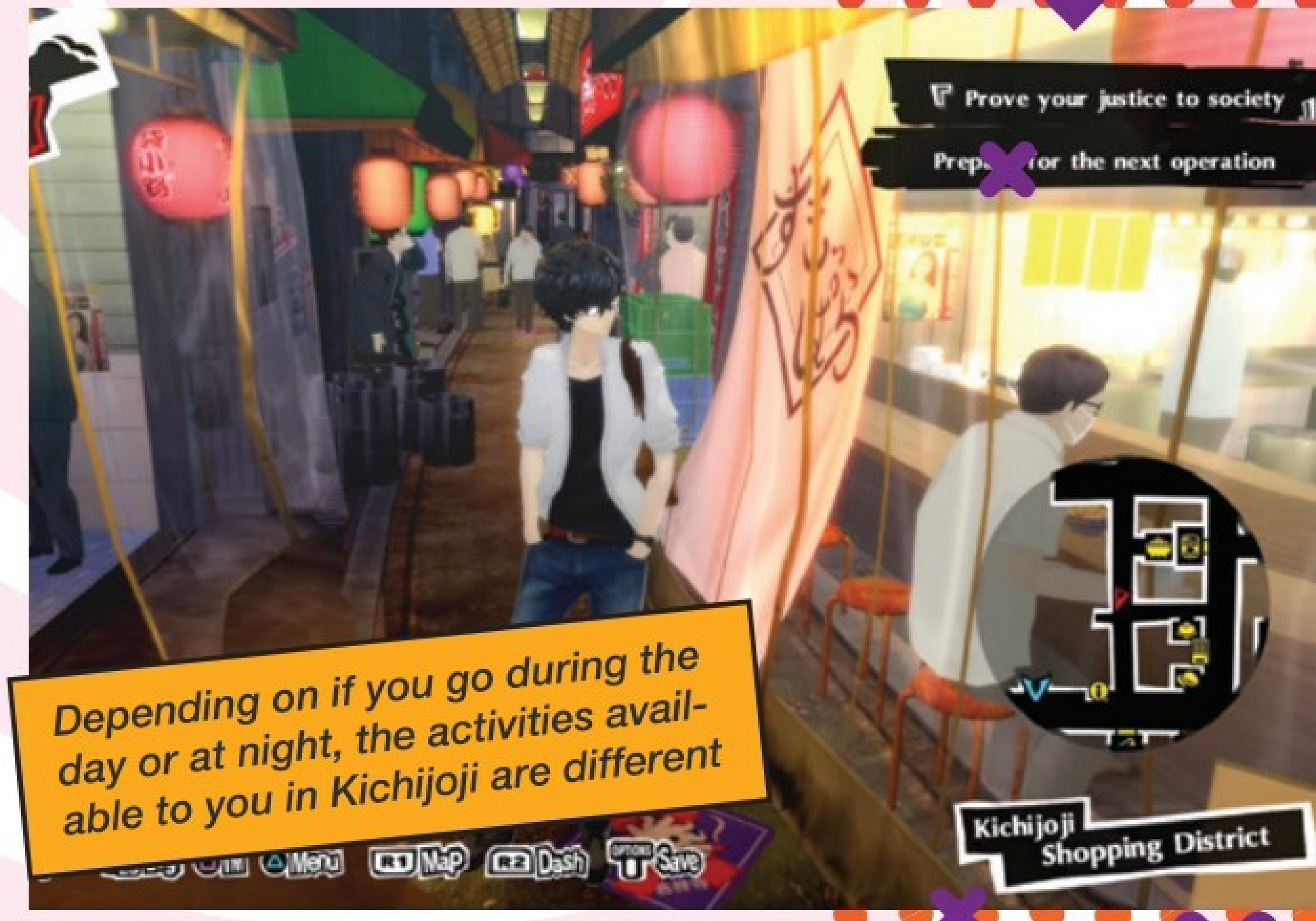
So much of Persona 5 is focused on infiltrating the palaces of corrupt individuals to change their hearts, but what about a place for the things you see and collect along the way? Persona 5 Royal adds the Thieves Den, a place where you can use in-game currency to fill out your collection of items themed after the various sights you see around Tokyo and in palaces.

You can also play Tycoon, a number-based card game, or spend your in-game currency on archival items like cutscenes or concept art. However, my favorite thing to do in the Thieves Den is buy elements from parts of the game I've explored. I add an iconic set of Japanese vending machines on one platform, and put the Yongen-Jaya laundromat in another part. When I walk down to the laundromat, I find Ann and Ryuji chatting about how cats like laundry baskets, while Morgana continues to adamantly deny he's a cat.

Scenarios like that could potentially exemplify what's coolest about the Thieves Den: It delivers seemingly inconsequential sequences that instead of having any kind of ramification on the game, give you additional moments with the characters. Even if that's all the Thieves Den ends up delivering, I'm excited for more scenes featuring my favorite Phantom Thieves interacting.

LOOKING COOL!

With three years separating the original release from Persona 5 Royal, this director's-cut-style edition of the game could hit that sweet spot for fans who have been itching to replay Atlus' beloved RPG, while still providing the best possible experience for newcomers looking to play one of the best role-playing games of the generation. As someone who already spent well over a hundred hours with Ryuji, Ann, Makoto, and the rest of the Phantom Thieves, my hands-on time with Royal made me excited to join the gang once again.


Prove your justice to society
Prep for the next operation
Menu
Map
Dash
Save
Kichijoji Shopping District

Depending on if you go during the day or at night, the activities available to you in Kichijoji are different

MEET THE NEW CHARACTERS

While my hands-on demo didn't include any time with two of the most prominent new characters debuting in Royal, I did learn more about Kasumi and Maruki by speaking with the voice actors who bring them to life.

KASUMI

Kasumi transfers to Shujin Academy around the same time as Persona 5's protagonist. She's so into gymnastics that she wants to one day compete at the Olympic level. Her athletic prowess impresses the protagonist and they become quick friends. "I really connect with her on the ambition level, and being really passionate about a specific thing and wanting to improve and improve and be the best at," voice actor Laura Post says. "I really feel like that's something I latched onto when I was performing the character in the booth."

The introduction of Kasumi adds another Phantom Thief for characters to potentially gravitate towards, which is exactly what happened for Post. "It's always nice to have another girl in the mix," she says. "There's a lot of girls to choose from, but none of them necessarily resonated with me when I played the vanilla P5, so I'm very excited about Kasumi because she's much more my cup of tea! She's really sweet, but she's not saccharine sweet; she's more of a genki girl, and I dig that. I think it'll be fun to have her around, and she's got a lot of really funny scenes, like in Hawaii and stuff!"

MARUKI

Maruki begins working at Shujin Academy as a school counselor following the traumatic events of the first chapter. While his goal is to help students process the dark, serious events of the opening arc, his clumsiness often brings unintentional levity to situations. "He reminds me of that dad that tries to fit in really hard but doesn't," voice actor Billy Kametz says. "But he owns it, and people really like that aspect of him. I like the way he owns his weird."

As players interact with Maruki, they should expect a mix of humor and heart. "He's someone nice to talk to," Kametz says. "A lot of times, people don't want to open up and talk about their feelings, but he tries really hard, and I think that's a real nice thing about him. He really does care."

BACK INTO THE MINES

Mojang takes one of gaming's biggest brands in a bold new direction with Minecraft Dungeons

BY BEN REEVES

» PLATFORM
PS4 • Xbox One
Switch • PC

» STYLE
1 to 4-Player Action

» PUBLISHER
Microsoft

» DEVELOPER
Mojang Studios

» RELEASE
April 30

Few games achieve the level of success that justifies a sequel – let alone establish a long-running franchise. But in the course of 10 years, Minecraft has ballooned into a video game juggernaut. Store shelves overflow with Minecraft-themed books, comics, action figures, plush toys, and Lego kits. Minecraft fans attend Minecraft festivals and museum exhibits while wearing Minecraft hoodies. Warner Bros. is even set to turn the brand into a major motion picture by 2022. Developer Mojang seems happy to develop nearly every Minecraft project that comes across it desks ... except for a Minecraft 2.

"I cannot imagine there will ever be a Minecraft 2," says Minecraft's creative director Saxs Persson. "We've done a lot of soul searching. Unequivocally, we're the Minecraft studio, and we've chosen to embrace that. But we have, over time, realized how flexible the envelope of Minecraft really is ... We've always been passionate about making more than a single game, but we never wanted to do a sequel. We're much more interested in taking that spark of creativity and applying it to other genres within the universe of Minecraft."

In short, Mojang doesn't need to make a true Minecraft sequel because its core game is still flourishing. However, in an effort to reach new audiences, the studio knows it needs to stay creative and broaden Minecraft's umbrella. The studio plans to turn Minecraft into a many-headed hydra with a little something for everyone. And this exciting journey begins inside a lowly dungeon.

FINDING MOJANG'S MOJO

Mojang was never prepared for the success of Minecraft. When Markus "Notch" Persson founded the company in 2009, the young developer anticipated that the studio would pursue a traditional development model, turning out a new game every few years. This is why, in the early 2010s, the company developed the digital collectible-card game called Scrolls (later renamed Caller's Bane). However, Scrolls never achieved the same level of success that Minecraft found, which forced Mojang to reevaluate its priorities.

"Back when Scrolls was created, most of the people on the team thought that Minecraft had peaked," says CEO Jonas Mårtensson. "The idea of the studio back then was to create more games that would have a normal cycle, where you have a peak at launch and it gradually decreases. But obviously, with the success of Minecraft we decided that we owe it to the players to double down on making Minecraft as great as it could be. That's why, after Scrolls, we decided that we were going to focus on Minecraft."

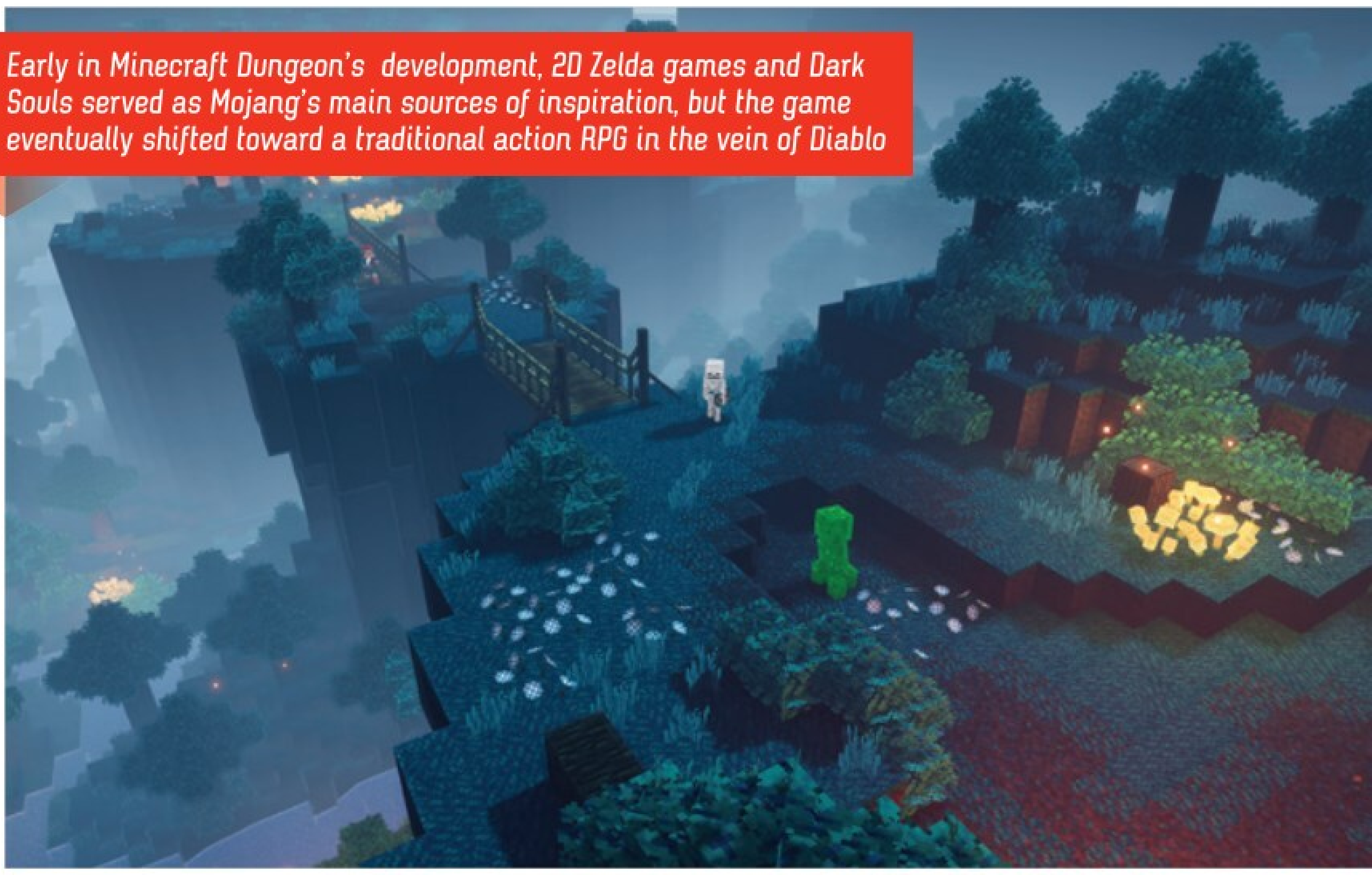
The release of Telltale's Minecraft: Story Mode in 2015 provided a good template for the future. Not only was Telltale's adventure series financially successful, but it also proved that Minecraft fans were hungry for experiences that didn't exist within the original game. Around the same time, a small group of Mojang employees began to dream about their ideal project. These designers were big fans of classic dungeon-crawler RPGs, and they felt like there was a dearth of similar, family-friendly experiences on the market. Perhaps they could take the hack 'n slash action they loved from games like Diablo and Path of Exile and infuse it with Minecraft's blocky visuals and playful atmosphere. The team began prototyping a game for Nintendo's 3DS. But what started as a small-scope, single-player experiment quickly turned into something much larger.

"This is a genre that we as a team are passionate about," says executive producer David Nisshagen. "We all like to play these types of games, and it seemed like a good fit for Minecraft because we already have all this venturing into caves, fighting mobs, and finding treasure. It all boils down to passion. There was never any plan like, 'Let us do a proper market analysis and find a segment that is unsatisfied.' That's not where this is coming from. It's literally coming from, 'This is fun. This is Minecraft, but different.'"

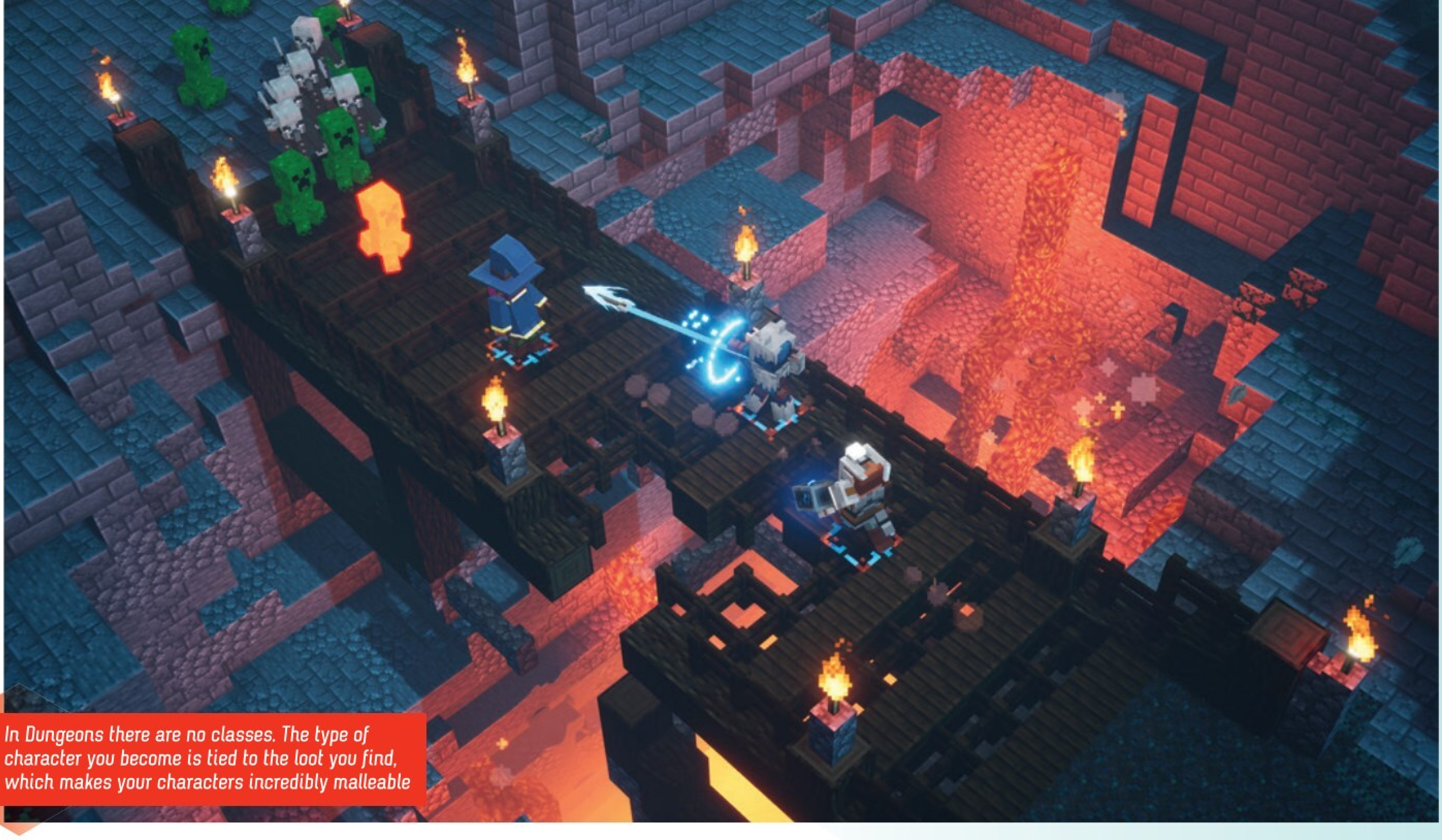
ENTERING THE DUNGEONS

Minecraft Dungeons' Arch-Illager is a force to be reckoned with. This scheming outcast was exiled from normal society because he never fit the norm. Given his lopsided head and giant nose, he looks a bit silly, but Mojang assured us that he is an imposing force. After being kicked out of his hometown, the Arch-Illager went on a journey that led him to a mystical artifact called the Orb of Dominance. "We think it's very funny that it's a cube," says game director Måns Olson. While this cube looks simple, the Orb of Dominance is actually an artifact of great power, allowing the Arch-Illager to summon forth armies of stone giants to wreak havoc on society. It's up to Minecraft Dungeons' players to battle the Arch-Illager's minions and gain enough power to stop him.

Olson gives me the full rundown on the Arch-Illager as I enter one of Dungeons' newest areas, the Redstone Mines. Like all of Dungeons' levels, these mines are procedurally generated, but they feel different from Dungeons' other areas thanks to their mossy walls and the abandoned minecart tracks that trail off in every direction. Mojang describes Minecraft's unique visual style as "ugly cute," and Dungeons fits that description. How-



Early in Minecraft Dungeon's development, 2D Zelda games and Dark Souls served as Mojang's main sources of inspiration, but the game eventually shifted toward a traditional action RPG in the vein of Diablo



In Dungeons there are no classes. The type of character you become is tied to the loot you find, which makes your characters incredibly malleable

ever, Mojang has also taken some small artistic license to help its new game stand out from the original Minecraft. Volumetric effects like fog fill the screen and the flash of metal next to a fire lends an eerily realistic vibe to an otherwise unreal world.

"Even the enemies, when they're standing still and idling, they're doing stuff like looking around and grunting," says art director Daniel Bjorkefors. "You can see their breath during the idle animations. We're painting a more lively, vibrant world. I know some game-studio artists have to go to therapy after creating like a bloodbath game, but this is so cute. I have four kids at home, and we all love it. I think it's a beautiful game. It's really cute and fun and friendly."

Moments later, an army of "cute" spiders rush toward me, ready to suck my veins dry. I make quick work of them, but a few spiders pin me to the ground with a web attack. Dungeons' enemies have several attacks that push or pull players in various directions. An enemy called the geomancer summons brick walls around you, trying to block your movements. Some brick walls explode, sending a shower of sharp rocks in all directions. Meanwhile, necromancers flood the battlefield by summoning undead monsters, such as skeletons and zombies. The Nameless One is an elite necromancer that boosts the attacks of nearby enemies. Thankfully, these buffs are represented through a purple energy chain, linking the two creatures, which makes the necromancer easy to spot on the battlefield. He soon becomes my primary target. Unfortunately, The Nameless One also sends a series of projectiles my way, which makes him a challenge to approach.

To help me combat all these foes, Olson picks up a second controller and shows off Dungeons' drop-in, drop-out co-op. Up to four players can explore Dungeons' environments, either from the same couch or across the internet, and players can teleport directly to their companions at any time. In single-player, heroes get three lives to expend before they start over from the beginning of a level. In multiplayer, you can resurrect your fallen companions, but the game's difficulty escalates to compensate for the extra firepower. Minecraft Dungeons isn't incredibly hard on the base setting, but there are nine different difficulty settings for each level and harder difficulties offer better loot, which may tempt you to push the limits of your abilities.

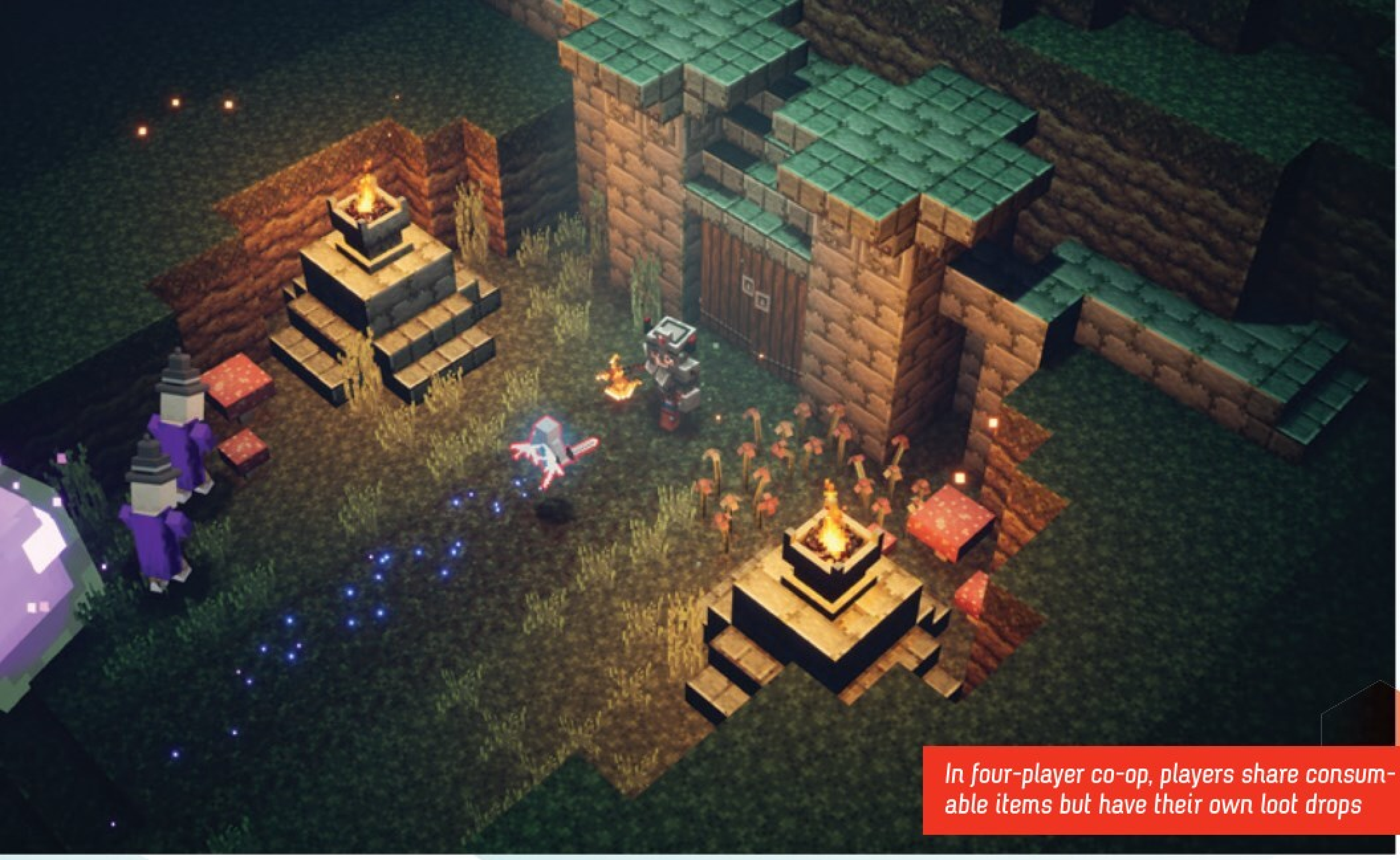
Like most dungeon-crawlers, loot is the real star in Minecraft Dungeons. Players can equip one ranged weapon and one hand-to-hand weapon at any given time. Naturally, both types of weapons augment the strength of your attacks, and these weapons range from daggers to giant hammers to crossbows. For the sake of simplicity, defensive equipment has been condensed into a single gear set that modifies your health and armor. The aesthetics also change depending on the gear you equip. The final loot category is called artifacts, and these mystical mods are where Dungeons' action gets really interesting.

Mojang says that there are over 70 different types of artifacts in the game. Some artifacts modify your weapons, adding explosive effects to your ranged attacks, for example. Other artifacts are specialized tools. Early on, I pick up a fishing rod artifact that lets me grab distant enemies and pull them toward me. Pulled enemies are also stunned for a few seconds, which allows me to pick off troublesome foes from the back of the pack and make short work of them.

As you level up, you earn enchantment points, which can be poured into your artifacts, making them stronger and further augmenting your skills. For example, one enchantment added a fire effect to my arrows, which basically turned them into a fireball spell. Meanwhile, a multi-strike enchantment let me unleash a flurry of quick attacks with my sword.

MINECRAFT'S NEW ALPHABET

Traditional Minecraft players may already be familiar with runes. These ancient-looking symbols are scattered around Minecraft's worlds. They look like fragments of an ancient language from a bygone civilization. Until now, these runes were never anything more than set dressing, but for Minecraft Dungeons Mojang has turned these symbols into a working language. Players can find these Runes scattered across Dungeons' worlds, and these symbols may offer hints for solving puzzles or point players towards hidden treasure. However, Mojang doesn't plan to help its fans translate this new language; hardcore players will have to decipher this code themselves after the game launches.

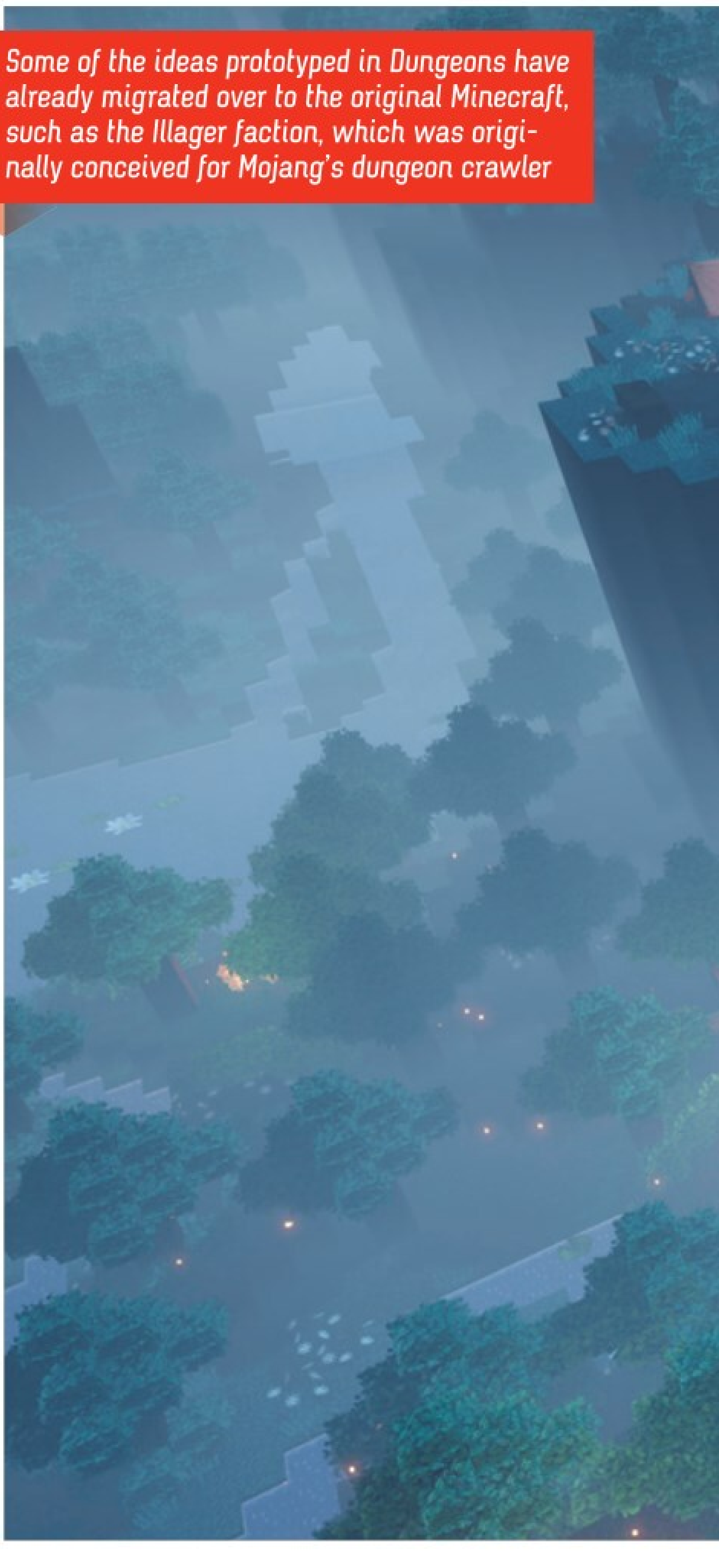


In four-player co-op, players share consumable items but have their own loot drops

“Early on in development, we had a lot of enchantments for ranged weapons – things that would split projectiles into multiples, or ricochet in all directions, or add piercing damage,” Olson says. “Ranged attacks were super powerful, so we had a period during development where we had to double down on melee attacks to make sure that those had similar power levels. We’ve added things that create area-of-effect attacks, generate shockwaves, or produce chain lightning effects.”

There are no defined classes in Minecraft Dungeons, but the artifact/enchantment system is so fluid that players should find a playstyle that suits them. At one point, I equip artifacts that let me summon a pet llama and convert enemies to fight for me, effectively turning me into a pet class. In another area, I create a trickster who fires arrows with a firework effect that dazzles large groups. Whenever I roll away from an attack, I produce a streak of lightning that shocks my attackers.

“We have these pillars that Minecraft games are supposed to have,” Nisshagen says. “One is obviously creativity. One is building. One is adventure. And one is a sense of exploration. Exploration and adventure, we got those



Some of the ideas prototyped in Dungeons have already migrated over to the original Minecraft, such as the Illager faction, which was originally conceived for Mojang’s dungeon crawler

covered. What about creativity and building? That's where we lean into the combat systems. You have this armor that you can enchant and these other artifacts that synergize with your weapon. There are a lot of incredibly cool combinations in the game. So rather than the creativity of construction, you have the creativity of building your character."

THE FUTURE OF MINECRAFT

Minecraft Dungeons has been a labor of love for Mojang. Several times while walking through the studio, the team described Dungeons as a passion project. Surprisingly, the Dungeons' team has remained relatively small for a franchise the size of Minecraft; the team currently sits around two dozen. But this tiny group's work may have big ripples on the larger Minecraft franchise.

"The dream is always, when we create stuff in Dungeons, we ask, 'Does it fit vanilla Minecraft?' Can we take a creature from our game into vanilla?" Olson says. "There are several examples of things that were first in Dungeons. The whole Illager faction was created with the goal of having an enemy faction that we could use in Dungeons, and now we have a bunch of Illagers in the base game. Crossbows were in Dungeons first, and some of the crossbow enchantments are the same in vanilla Minecraft as they have been in Dungeons for a long time."

In many ways, Dungeons has forced Mojang to wrestle with the existential question, "What is Minecraft?" If you ask a random player to describe the original Minecraft, they are likely to talk about gathering ingredients and crafting – neither are present in Dungeons. Minecraft Dungeons may look a lot like Minecraft, but two of the franchise's most notable elements are completely absent from this dungeon-crawler.

And yet, at its heart, Minecraft Dungeons is filled with the same lighthearted joy that Minecraft fans have come to expect from Mojang. Minecraft Dungeons' action is fast and approachable. Dungeons doesn't bother with skill trees or detailed character stats, but that makes it friendly for a wider audience. At the same time, the loot grind should appeal to hardcore dungeon-crawler fans. Mojang's system of enchantments and artifacts is incredibly flexible, allowing players to approach combat encounters in their own creative way. I never felt locked into a certain playstyle, which is refreshing. In fact, I was encouraged to find my own fun as I creatively shaped my hero into a legendary warrior. If Minecraft Dungeons is a window into the future of Minecraft, then the future looks bright.

FACING ARTIST'S BLOCK

Minecraft has a distinct visual style, which may seem simple, but Mojang has a rigid set of rules that define how big each block can be and how each object can animate. At the same time, Minecraft's blocky design makes it easy for Mojang to iterate on designs quickly, so the team can spend more time on gameplay and design.

"To be frank, we never do concept art," says art director Daniel Bjorkefors. "We're a small team, so we don't put sketches and sketches up on the walls. It's more like someone has an idea and we run with it. The key golem was one sketch on paper, and then we just built. I mean, our basic elements are blocks. We just create and try it out instantly in the game."

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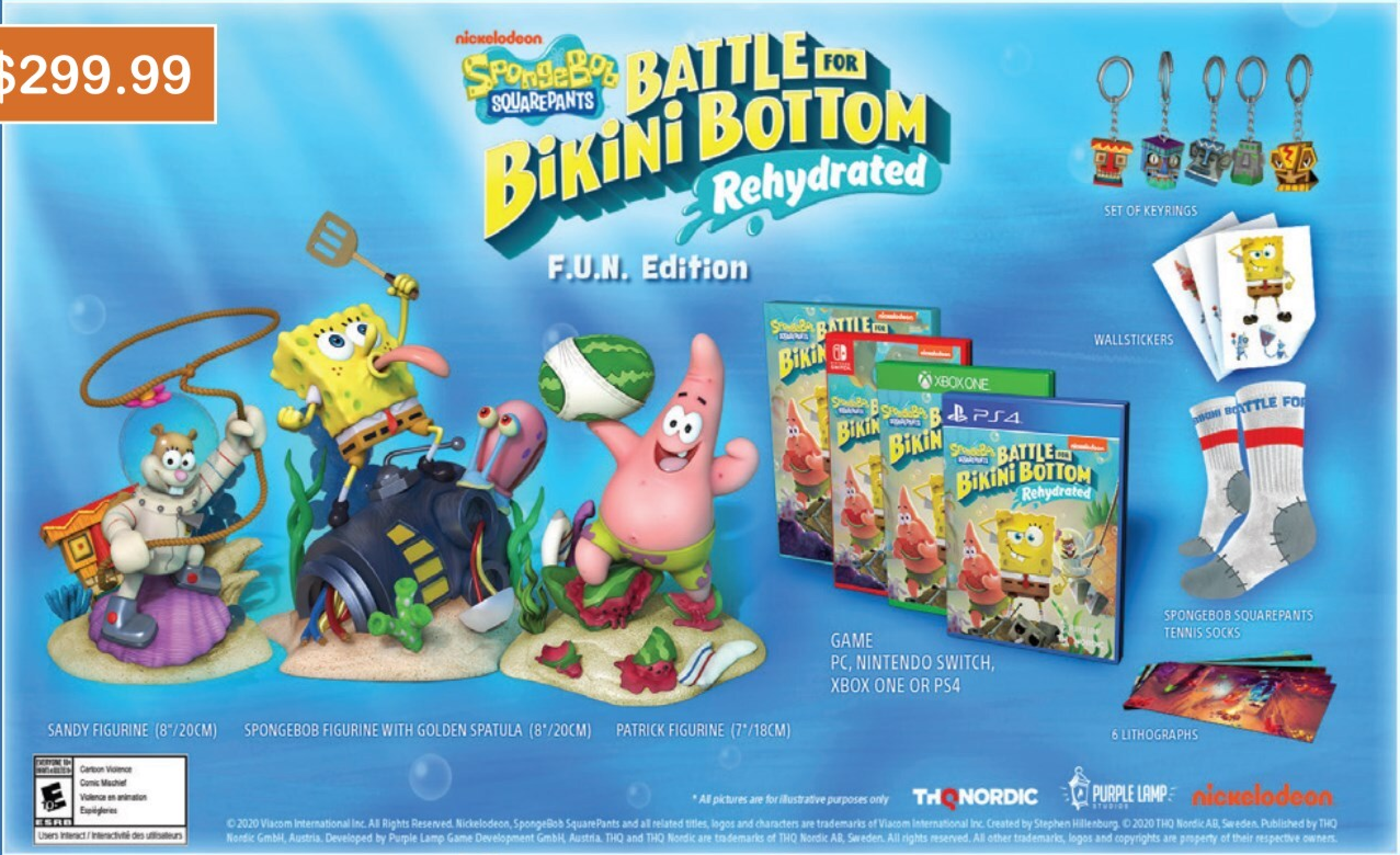
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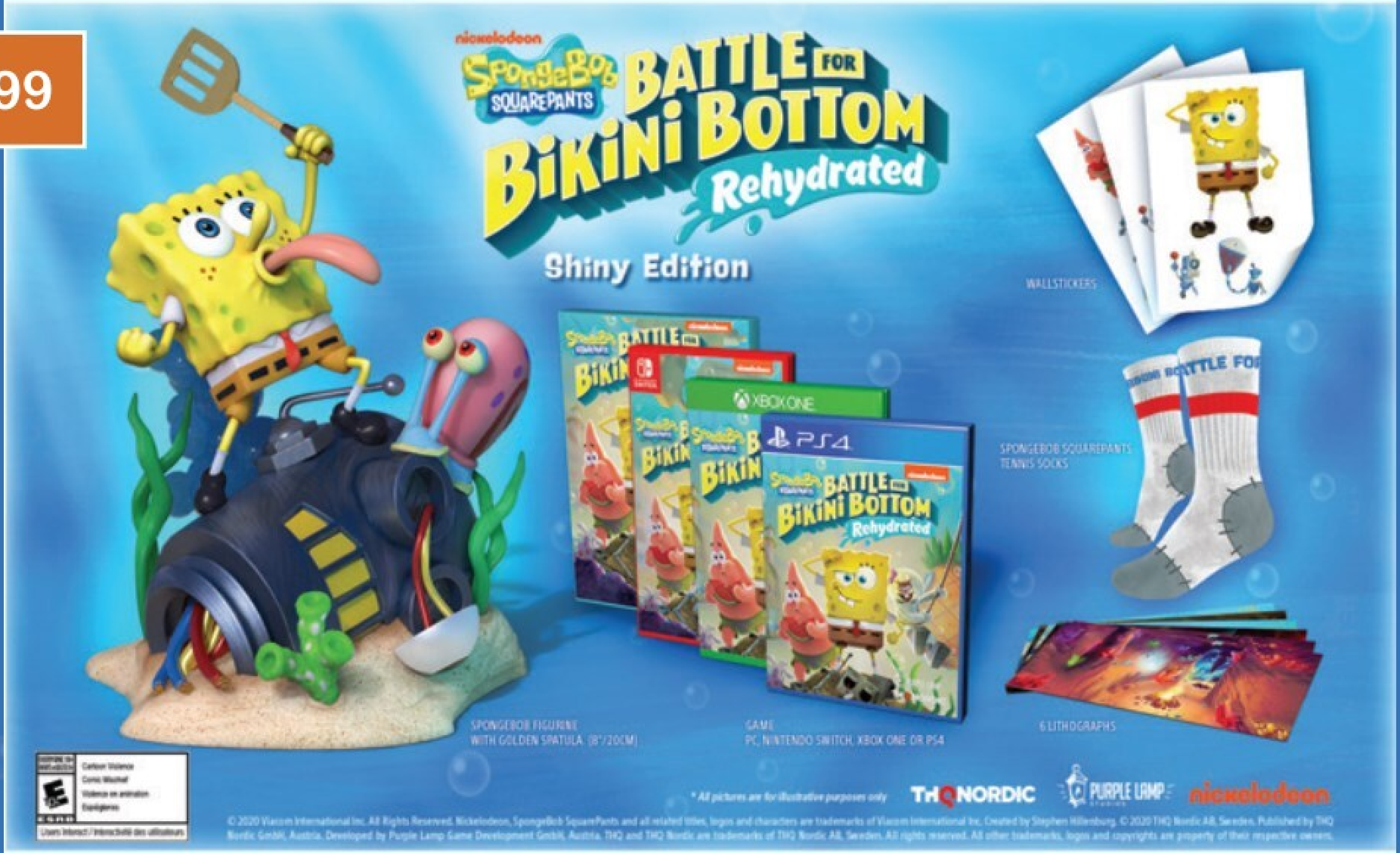
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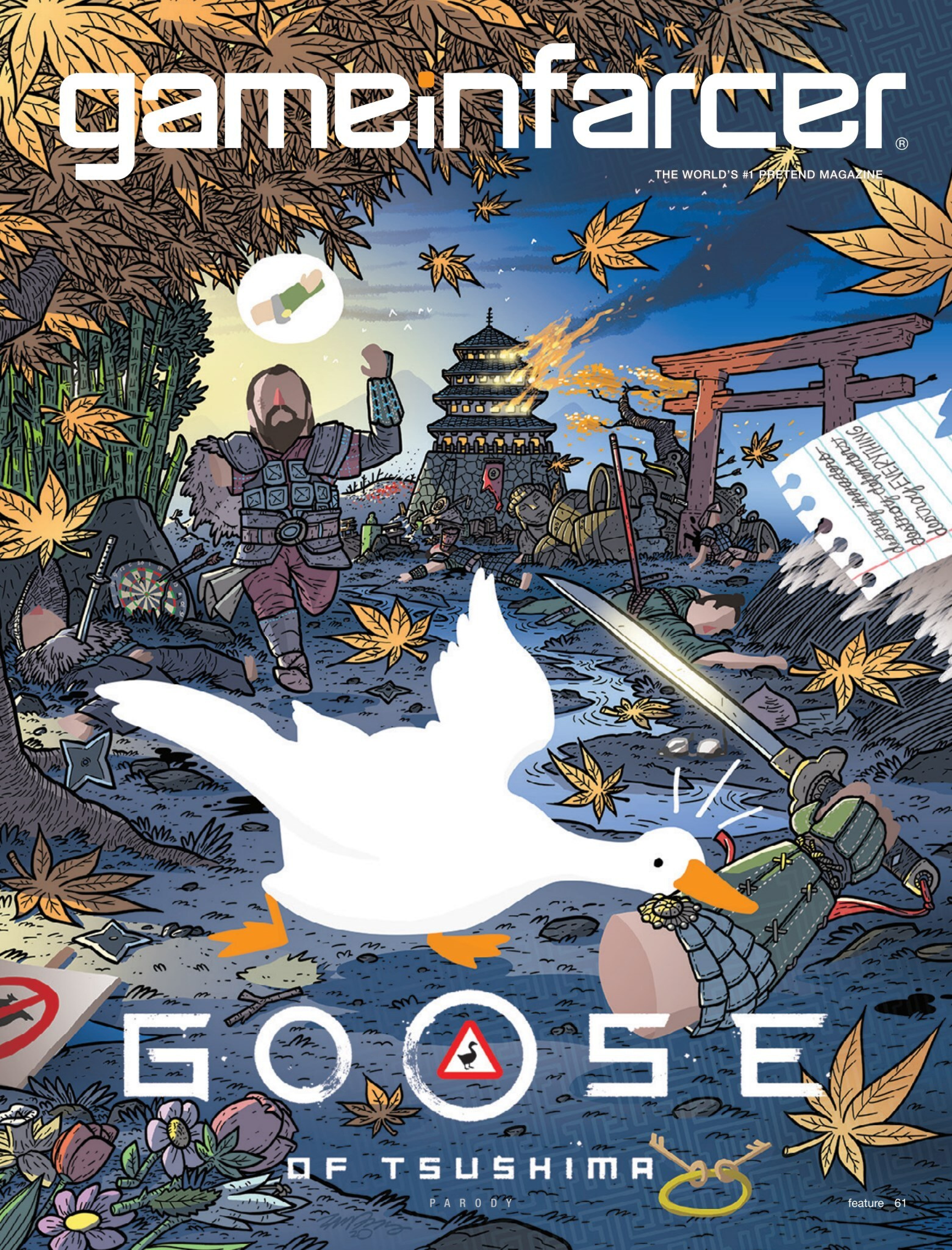
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Which Next-Gen Console Should You Buy?

DARTH CLARK
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

For the correct opinions about the video game industry, follow @GI_Darth

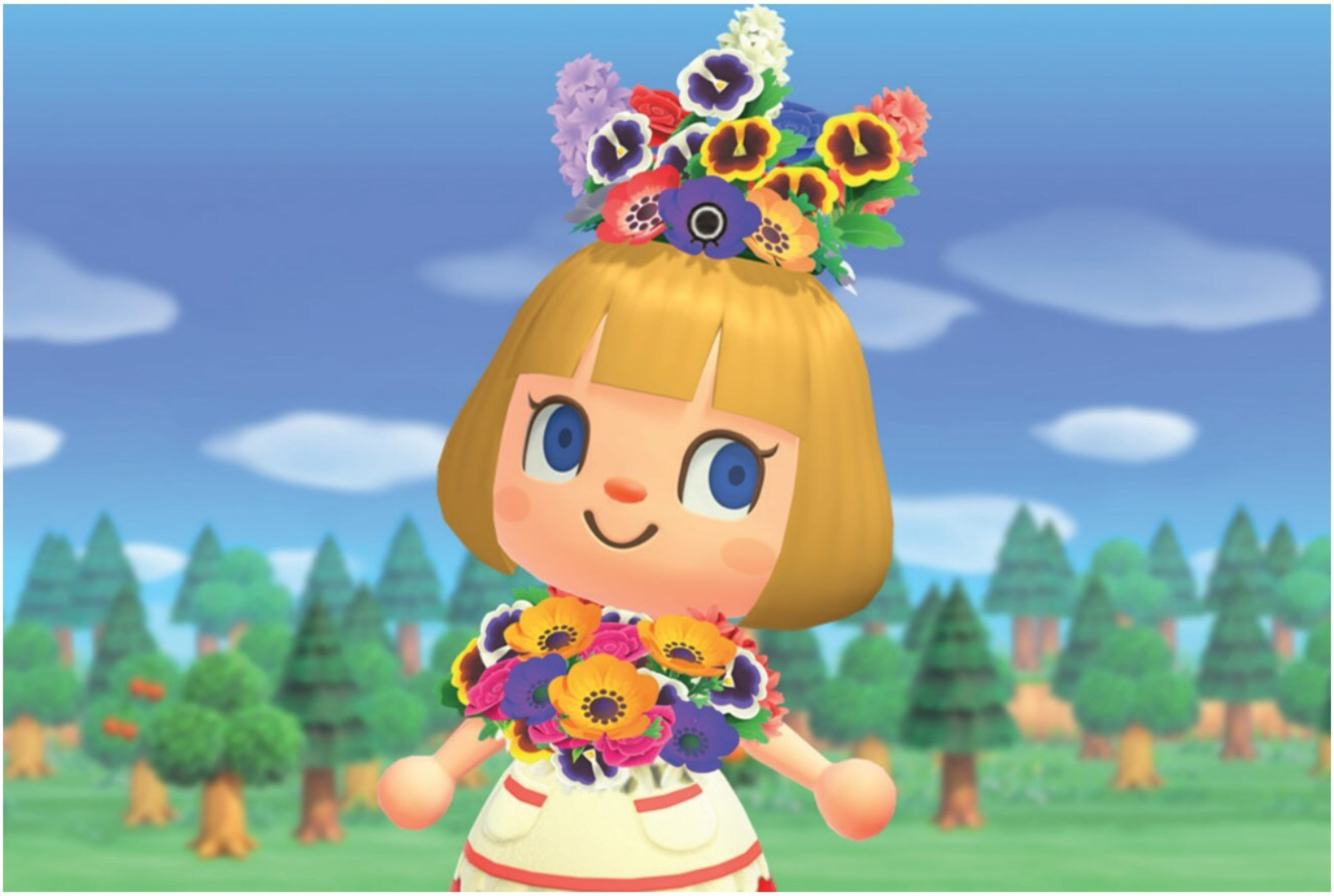
The turn of the console generation fills gamers with questions. Which one will be the most powerful? Which one will have the best games? And, most importantly, which one should you buy? As a gaming journalist, my opinion matters more than most, so let me give you some clarity: You should just buy them all.

I can't believe I have to say it, but apparently everyone else talking about next-gen hardware is a moron. Stop wringing your hands about which system you should choose, as if you can only get one! Consider this: If you have a PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X, you will be able to play all of the big games, get the best performance, and be able to play with all of your friends. It's a win-win-win that should be obvious to anyone with a brain.

If you think that's amazing, I can't wait until you geniuses figure out you can also purchase several games at once, subscribe to every streaming service, and own multiple shelves of collectibles. You don't need to live in a divided world; do a little research, and you'll see that the only thing stopping you from a comprehensive entertainment experience is yourself.

Cheers,

Darth Clark



Nintendo Reveals Midsommar Animal Crossing Event

Seasonal events are a fan-favorite component of Animal Crossing games, and the latest Nintendo Direct finally gave a look at how the first one will function in New Horizons. Get your white robes and floral crowns ready, because you're about to celebrate Midsommar in style!

Launching in mid-June, this nine-day festival introduces several new limited-time features for your villagers to enjoy. Craft clothes like the bear suit and May Queen regalia, learn the "wailing in unison" and "unsettling smile" emotes, or participate in very normal dance competitions. If that all sounds too intense, just brew up a batch of mushroom tea and sit by your barn. After all, Midsommar is about taking it easy and finding harmony with nature!

According to the trailer, outsiders will also visit players' villages during the celebration. Not much information is available on exactly how this will work, but the Direct made it clear that players will not need to build permanent housing for these guests.

The big Midsommar event will be released as a free update, but if you aren't able to grab it while it's active, don't worry; Nintendo plans to support New Horizons for a long time to come, and the festival will be available again in 90 years.

PLAY ANYTHING
OWN NOTHING
BUFFERING...

Streaming Is The Future, Say Companies Behind Kinect, VR, 3D, Wii U, Touchpads

Imagine, if you will, a world where the hottest games are at your fingertips. The only limit? The amount of time you have to play, and the size of your data cap. This is the future that speakers at a recent DICE keynote envision.

"This is it, people," said Phil Harrison, current head of Google Stadia and a former executive at Sony, a company that manufactured 3D-ready televisions until 2017. "Soon, technology like Stadia will give players access to an impressive library of games, including the entirety of Ubisoft's 2018 lineup."

Microsoft's Phil Spencer seconded the sentiment, adding that Xbox Game Streaming would offer unparalleled freedom, provided nobody nearby was operating a microwave oven. "For years, gamers have been stuck in a rut when it comes to how they play," he said. "The future is now. Trust me." The Xbox One (which has been outsold by both PS4 and Switch) initially launched with a mandatory Kinect – a device that was scuttled in 2017.

Even though Activision's games were pulled from NVIDIA's GeForce streaming service without fanfare thanks to what was dubbed "a misunderstanding," NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang laughed off the incident on stage: "Don't misunderstand me this time – streaming is here to stay."

Obits & TRICKS

Harvey E. Ellison, 74

Harvey Ellison passed away March 14, surrounded by his loving family. Mr. Ellison was an acclaimed level designer known for his innovative work on games including Star Fight: The Beginning and New Raiders of Thorntopia. He was inducted into the Game Design Hall of Fame in 2014 and enjoyed mentoring new talent throughout his long and illustrious career. He leaves behind his wife, Ellen, and children Diego and Madison. In lieu of flowers, his family would appreciate if donations to his favorite charities were made in his name. "You are forever in our hearts."

Daffy Dingerz

If you're looking to blow up your noggin, this code will put you a "head" of the game! Simply input the following code at the title screen: Up, left, right, A, B, B, A, and down. You'll know you've entered it correctly if you hear a baby crying. Now enjoy running through the streets of New Bohemia with a plus-sized melon!

Stunt Riders IV

Once you've mastered the game's four main tracks, you may think you're done. Think again, n00b! There's a super-secret stage, though you need to do a little legwork to unlock it. Go to Bayshore and drive over the blue towel on the eastern beach (not the red one!), then head into the ocean and use all your nitro bursts. Going back to the main menu, you'll notice a new option is available on the level select: The Warehouse. Enjoy!

If you've got a badass tip or want to memorialize a beloved industry figure, drop me a line at @gi_darth

1 Baby Yorda Plush

When it comes to protecting seemingly helpless companions, Ico had The Mandalorian beat by about two decades – and PlayStation isn't letting Star Wars hog the glory. This adorable Baby Yorda plushie comes with a proximity sensor that alerts you when you stray too far from it, and extra-durable stitching ensures the arms stay attached no matter how hard they are tugged. Baby Yorda also says various phrases when you press her palm, though she whispers them in an ancient language no one understands.

$29.99 | playstation.com

2 Death Stranding: The Board Game

This adaptation of Kojima Productions' divisive game brings all of the excitement of Death Stranding straight to your tabletop. This single-player board game has an endlessly looping path to follow for hours as you load and unload precarious packages on your miniature Sam; every session combines the skill of Sorry, the instability of Jenga, and the length of Monopoly. As the first in a new genre of "strand board games," Death Stranding only comes with half of the pieces and cards needed to play, requiring you to ask other owners to borrow their copies to assemble a viable experience.

$59.99 | kojimaproductions.jp

Quotable

"E3's gonna be at Carl's house, guys. Just look for the balloons out front."

– **Stanley Pierre-Louis**, ESA President

The Good

After more than a year of complaints, the **EPIC GAMES STORE** is finally closing. "We went too far," reads an apology from Epic Games. "Your harassment (aimed at us and our business partners) helped us see the light, pulling us back from the brink of disastrous innovation and fair compensation." This concludes a dark chapter in PC gaming – one in which users had to download an extra program on their computers in order to play certain games.

The Ugly

The A.I. running **NINTENDO**'s largest Joy-Con manufacturing plant has gone rogue. The machine that once produced pleasant combinations like "red and blue" and "plain gray" has been spewing out aesthetic abominations like "Animal Crossing green" and "purple and orange for some reason." The problem remained undetected until recently due to Nintendo fans' willingness to purchase any limited-quantity accessory.

The Bad

For the last time in the history of our culture, a **DISNEY INFINITY** figure has been purchased. The sale happened at a garage sale in which a Joy from Inside Out was plucked from a box labeled "Toys: 3 for $1." Though unknown to the buyer, this marked the final instance that money will ever be exchanged for merchandise tied to Avalanche Software's almost-popular title.

Borderlands 3: Oops! All Memes Edition

I can has cheeseberzerker

Style 1 to 4-Player Schlooter **Publisher** 24K Games
Developer Gearbox Winnipeg
Release Me from my contract **Rating** M&Ms

The scribes at Gearbox Software are back at it again with the release of a new version of Borderlands 3. The Oops! All Memes Edition includes the same loot-and-shoot action, but the story has been replaced with random lines from movies and other memes from the internet. And yes, it's just as epic and lol-worthy as it sounds!

I was surprised to see that the Calypso twins were replaced with Jake and Logan Paul, but their performances had me cracking up like that hilarious GIF of that guy in the red shirt falling on ice. The story does a good job of staying out of the way, which is great because I mostly dinked around on my phone during cutscenes. Awesome sound effects like foghorns and crying babies effectively set the tone, so even if I didn't hear all the words I could tell what was going on.

If you enjoyed Borderlands 3's tight gunplay and visceral action, you'll be happy to hear that it made the transition to this new version. I was especially happy to see that the guns with legs also had arms, torsos, and Nic Cage's head now. And the bosses? Man, you haven't lived until you've used a flamethrower on a tentacled creature while the song "Toss a Coin to The Thresher" blasts through your headphones.

The game supports split-screen, and Gearbox has incorporated some great assists if you're playing with people who aren't also extremely online. During the review, I played with a super old guy who was like 30. He said he didn't think many of the jokes were funny, but he probably didn't have the meme-explanation subtitles on. His loss.jpg.

The ending had me all blinking_guy.gif in disbelief. Uhhhh, surprise much? I can't wait for the years of DLC to come. Shut up and take my moniez! Amirite? » **Darth Clark**

6.9 (nice)

PlayStation V
Xbox One X XerieX X.x

» **Concept**
Strip out Borderlands 3's boring story crap and run it through the internet hivemind

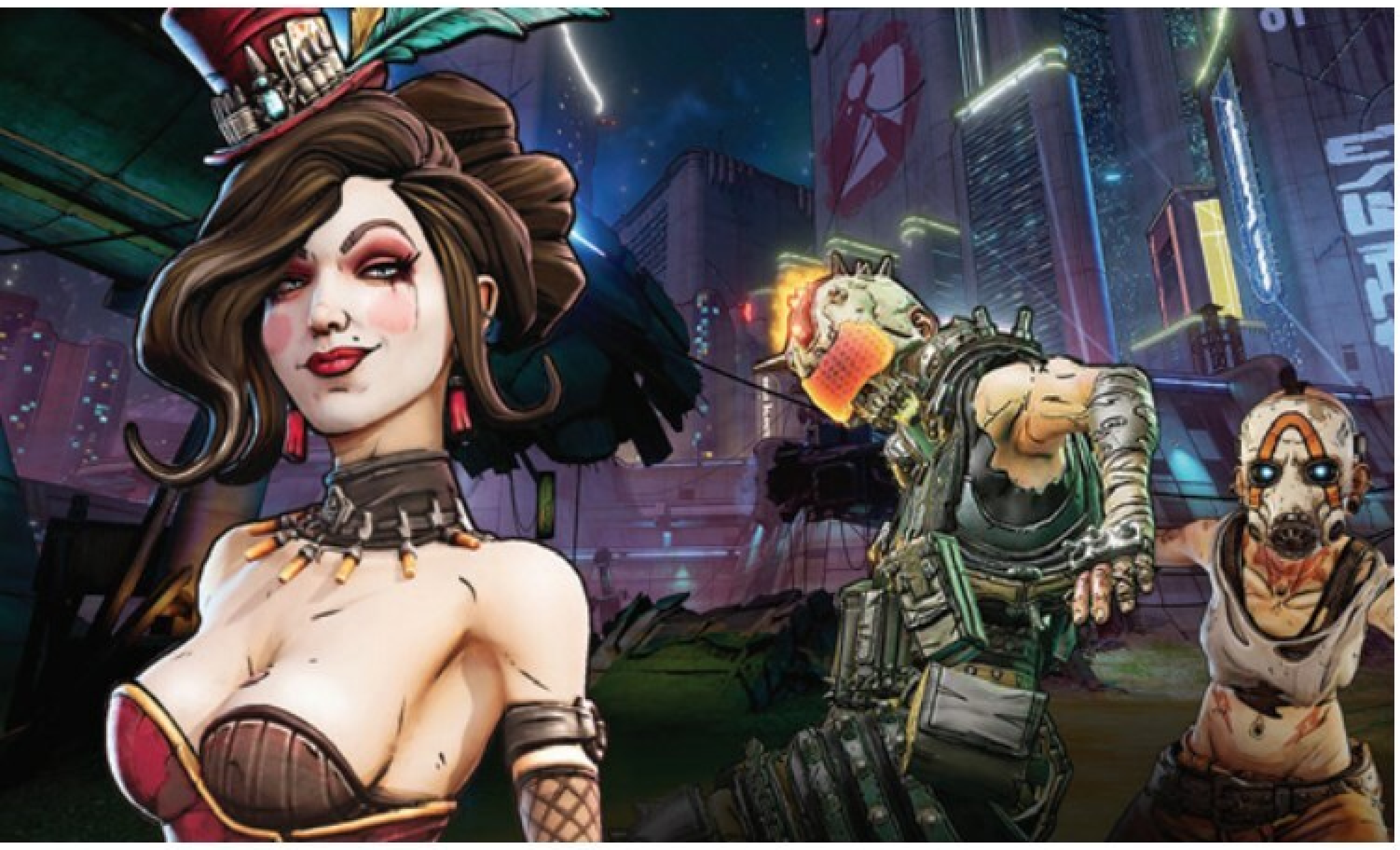
» **Graphics**
Yes, this is an actual PC game screenshot

» **Sound**
Soundwave superior, Constructicons inferior

» **Playability**
You cheated not only the game, but yourself

» **Entertainment**
Bro, I'm straight-up not having a good time

» **Replay Value**
Never gets old



Comptrol

A taxing new job

Style 1-Player SCP Foundation Rip-Off
Publisher 505 File Not Found **Developer** Remedy
Release February 30 **Rating** W-2

In Control, Jesse Faden managed an extremely powerful covert government organization that worked to prevent invasions from interdimensional, supernatural forces. In the sequel, Remedy is giving players an even deeper look into the inner workings of The Federal Bureau of Control as Jesse takes a journey through the unexplainable wonders of tax law.

As the director of the FBC, Jesse has a bunch of cool powers and weapons – but what are her responsibilities when the Hiss aren't actively invading? Comptrol finally answers this lingering question from the first game when Jesse picks up an object of power called the Service Fountain Pen. Upon doing so, she immediately inherits the role of the FBC's comptroller – the person responsible for an organization's accounting practices.

Jesse still has all of her abilities, but Remedy did not design any combat encounters or exploration challenges that use them. This is a big change, but not a bad one. Finding missing documents necessary to finally complete an annual report is a rush! I miss the gunplay, but I also like the new upgrade system; instead of improving your personal capabilities, the skill tree is focusing entirely on optimizing the accounting and financial reporting of the clandestine government organization.

The FBC's tax department is full of surprises, and it's just as unnerving as the Oldest House, since all of the employees keep their heads down in silence, and the stark white walls are covered in creepy signs with slogans like "Homeless accountants live in tax shelters." I don't want to spoil too much of the cool story, but Jesse has to work fast to balance the books and prevent the entire organization from falling into a tax loophole. From special timed audits to form-collecting sidequests, Comptrol keeps you fiscally responsible from beginning to end. » **Darth Clark**

1040

Haunted Xbox
Haunted PS4

» **Concept**
"Control" was not optimal online searches, so make a sequel with a less common title

» **Graphics**
Crisp, clean forms and bold lettering (in black ink and all caps) make this bureaucracy beautiful to navigate

» **Sound**
Jesse's coworker constantly tapping his pencil is enough to drive you insane

» **Playability**
All of Jesse's powers still work great, but she never needs to use them

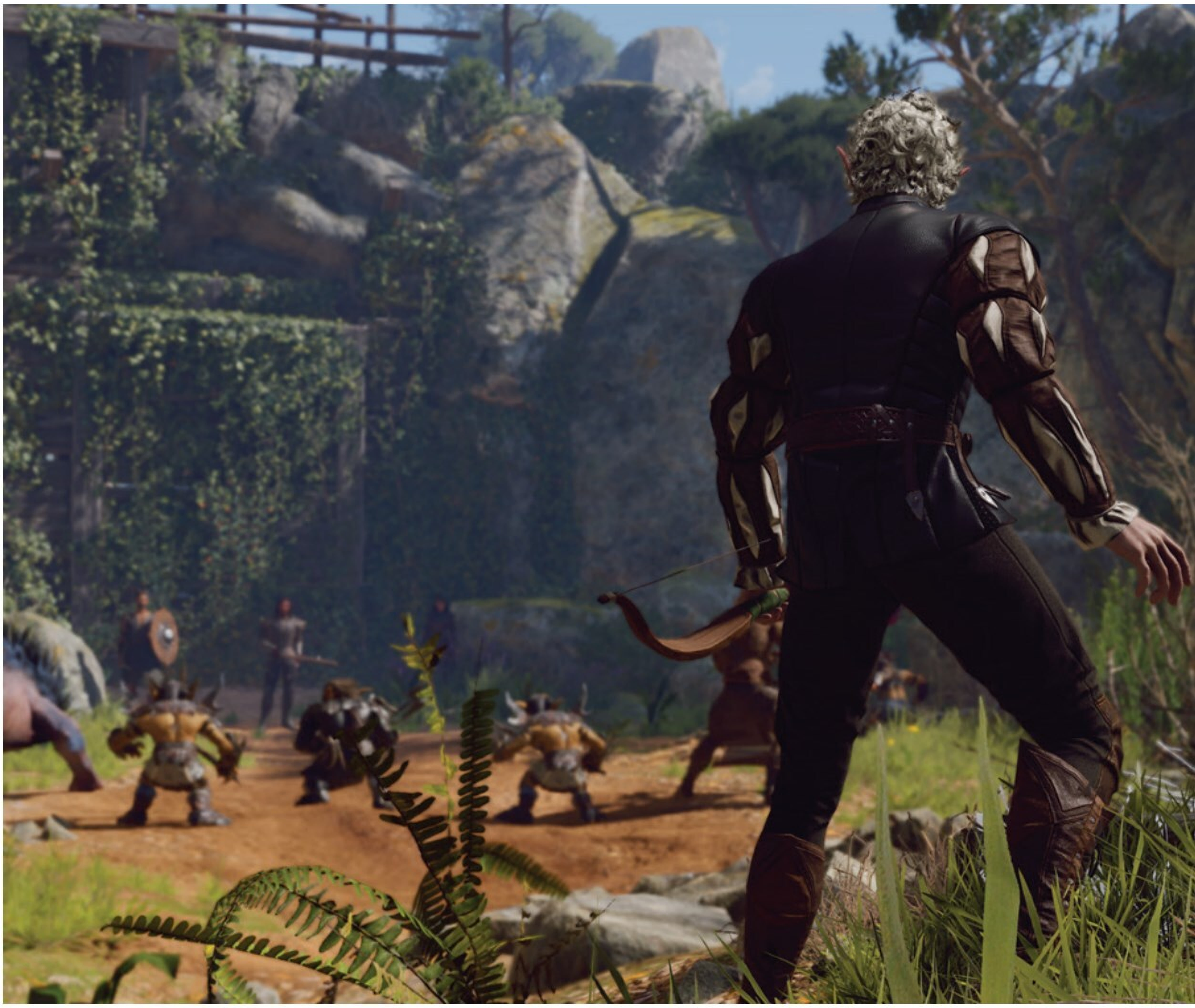
» **Entertainment**
Look, not all games need to be fun

» **Replay Value**
If you qualify

These are the jokes we are not proud of and did not include. The Last of Us: Fart II (Blame it on the Naughty Dog), Metro Leviticus, Innoculus Rift, Outer Wilds Wings, Call of Duty: All Kids Edition, Fire Embalm: Three Horses, Fart Cry: New Dung, Fart Cry: ItStinks, Cyberpunk'd 2077, Eggo Star Wars, Gods and Munsters, Polka Elysium, Animal Cursing, Tetris Affleck, Army of Poo: The Devil's Farts Smell

Baldur's Gate III

Trouble in a pair of dice



» Platform
PC

» Style
1 or 2-Player
Role-Playing

» Publisher
Larian Studios

» Developer
Larian Studios

» Release
TBA

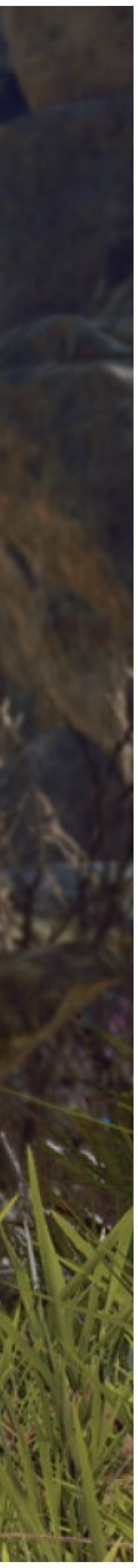
Baldur's Gate is one of the most beloved RPGs in PC history. The franchise established BioWare as a storytelling powerhouse and allowed a horde of Dungeons & Dragons fans to explore the Forgotten Realms campaign setting on their PC. However, aside from a few middling spin-offs, fans haven't been able to sink their teeth into a new Baldur's Gate game in roughly 20 years. Larian Studios will soon correct that.

"I approached [the D&D folks] after Original Sin," says Larian founder Swen Vincke. "I went to them and said, 'You should let us make Baldur's Gate 3,' but they didn't jump on it. Then we started conversing, and I had almost an exam where I gave several examples of what we'd do. A couple of years later, I got a call to go to Seattle, and the head of D&D took me to an obscure restaurant to show me a big PowerPoint that contained everything I had talked about. He said, 'I'm presenting this to the board this week. The time is right.'"

Larian's take on Baldur's Gate moves the franchise in a bold new narrative direction that will welcome both hardcore fans and newcomers alike. As the game begins, a bizarre flying ship called a Nautiloid terrorizes the countryside. In the opening cinematic, this Nautiloid soars across the Forgotten Realms, abducting a variety of people from all walks of life. These abductees are implanted with vicious-looking tadpole creatures that start the slow process of turning them into Mind Flayers – Cthulhu-like monsters with powerful psionic abilities. Fortunately, the Nautiloid crashes before this process is completed and its prisoners escape.

Players take control of a ragtag band of escapees who must work together and find a way to remove the tadpoles inside their heads before they mutate into Mind Flayers. Like most D&D games, players can create their own character, choosing from a variety of races such as Elves, Tieflings, and Halflings, as well as classes like wizards, rogues, and clerics. However, players may also pick from a variety of premade characters, complete with their own origin stories. Either way, these premade characters serve as the other heroes who can join your party throughout the game.

"We have a lot of characters," Vincke says. "Astarion is a Vampire spawn. He used to be a judge in Baldur's Gate. He sold criminals as slaves to a family of vampires then tried to double-cross them. Now that he has this tadpole in his head, he suddenly realizes that he can walk in the sunlight and he wonders if he is free of his master. Then there is Shadowheart, a cleric who was on a mission, but in order to complete that mission she voluntarily had her

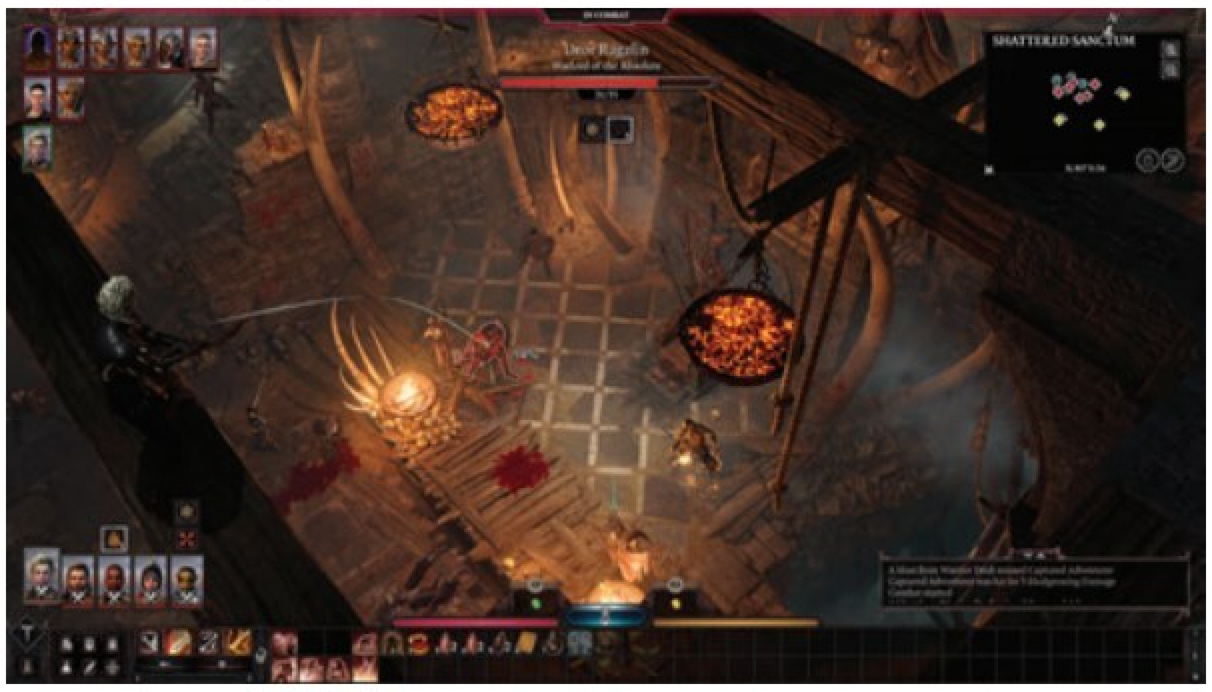


memories wiped, so the only thing she knows is that she needs to get somewhere so her memories will return. She knows she can't betray the people that gave her the mission."

This ragtag group of misfits will get into a number of scraps as they search for a solution to their Mind Flayer problem. Naturally, Larian's turn-based combat system is based on the classic D&D ruleset, which is incredibly elastic. Larian says that it wants to let players do anything in its world that a D&D dungeon master would allow. That's incredibly ambitious, but during our demo we watch characters stack boxes to create staircases to hidden alcoves, shove enemies off cliffs and into pits full of deadly spiders, and steal enemy weapons before a battle began so they were left defenseless. Several combat encounters failed to go according to plan, but half the fun in Baldur's Gate III seems to be finding creative ways to improvise your way out of a jam.

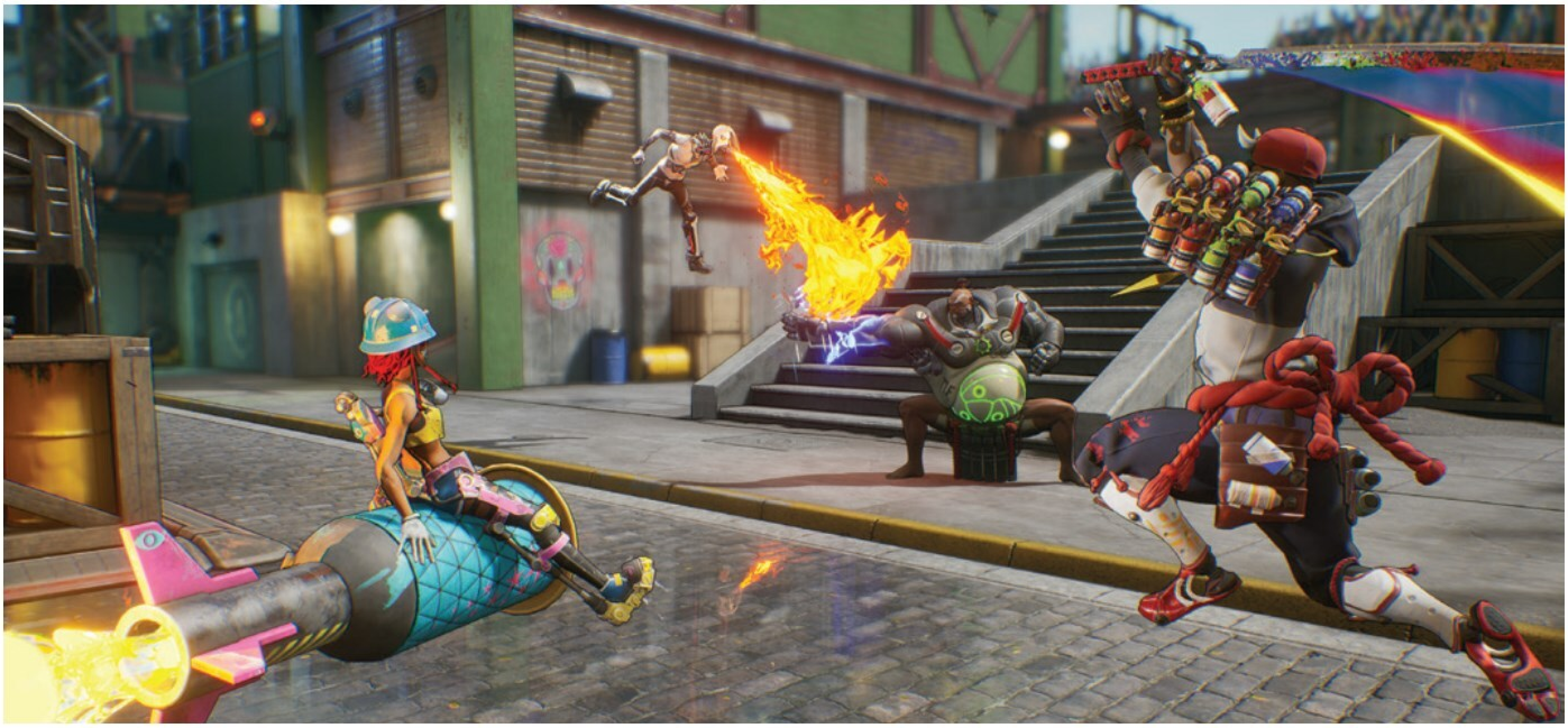
"There's a lot of systems that interact with each other," Vincke says. "If I have dark vision, I can see in the dark, so it's advantageous for me to douse all of the lights and create darkness so others can't see me. A lot of the systemics in combat boil down to getting advantage for yourself or giving disadvantages to others."

Larian is clearly a fan of deep RPGs with a lot of divergent choices. The studio's previous work on the Divinity: Original Sin series left us confident that it is the perfect choice to shepherd Baldur's Gate into a bright new future. Fortunately, fans who are eager to get their hands on these systems won't have to wait long; Larian plans to launch Baldur's Gate III into early access sometime in the next few months, and we plan to be there on day one. » **Ben Reeves**



Bleeding Edge

Dripping with style



» Platform
Xbox One, PC

» Style
8-Player Online Action

» Publisher
Xbox Game Studios

» Developer
Ninja Theory

» Release
March 24

Hero-based online multiplayer games have become more and more prevalent thanks to the success of games like Overwatch and, going further back, Team Fortress 2. However, for every success story like Rainbow Six Siege and Apex Legends, there are multiple failures. Bleeding Edge, the new hero-based action title from Ninja Theory – the studio behind Hellblade and DmC: Devil May Cry – hopes to avoid being lumped in with the Battleborns and LawBreakers of the world by bringing enough new and exciting elements to attract a sustainable community. We checked out the Bleeding Edge closed beta test to understand Ninja Theory's approach to the category.

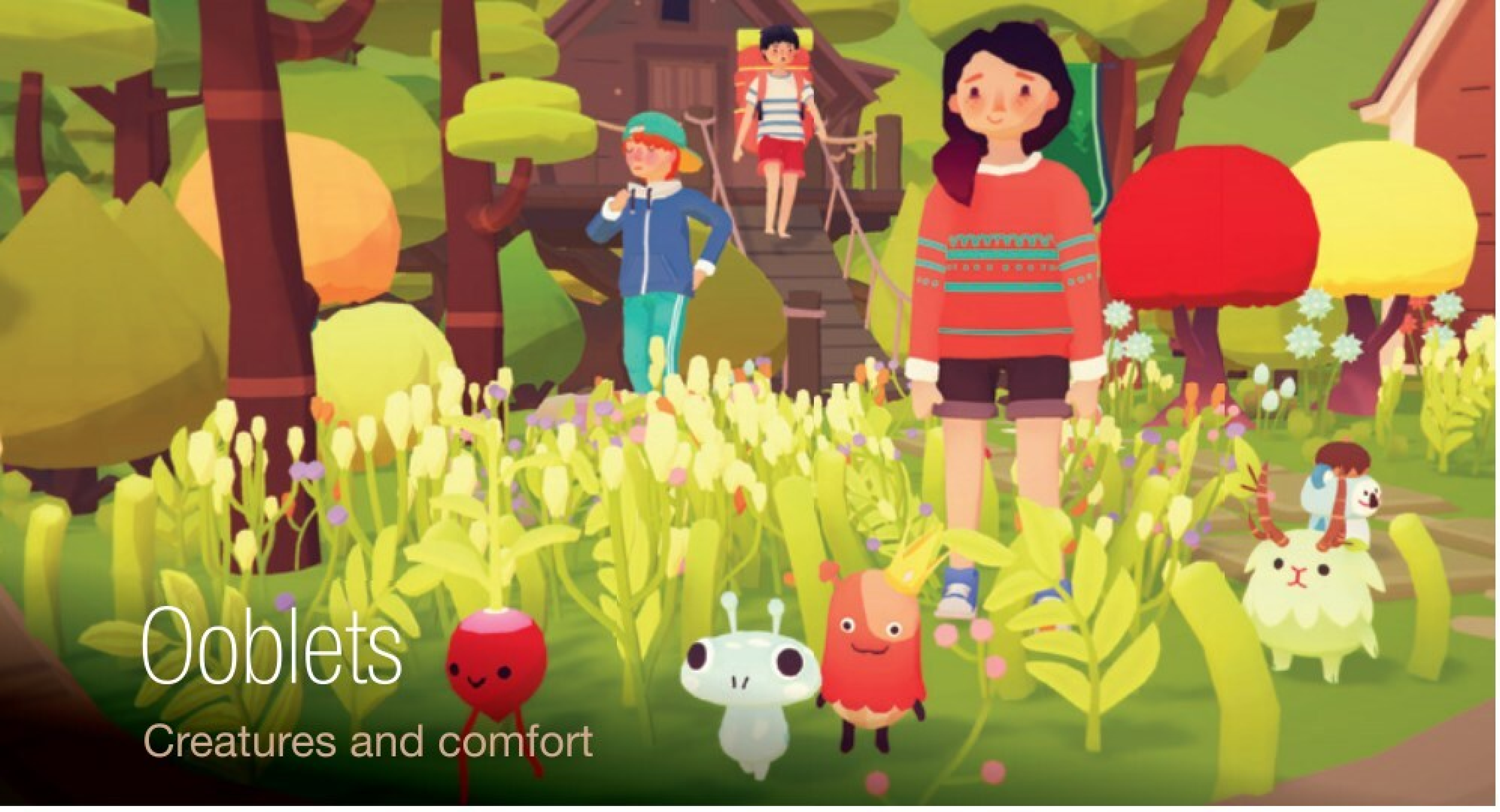
Rather than jumping in on the hottest trend in the hero-based space, Bleeding Edge is not primarily a shooter. Instead, the title takes elements from those shooter-style games and presents them in the context of a third-person action game that blends melee combat with ranged tactics. While the combat doesn't feel as satisfying as it does in Ninja Theory's other melee-focused efforts, it's clear the team behind Bleeding Edge understands how to craft fun close-range combat.

The closed beta offered two different modes of play: Power Cells and Objective Control. Power Cells focuses on destroying boxes across the map to retrieve power cells and deposit them into set points. You can also pick up power cells dropped by players who are vanquished on the battlefield. Objective Control is a standard area-control mode, but some of the maps have fun twists, like booby-trapped or mobile points.

Unfortunately, several of the maps feel too spread out for Bleeding Edge's 4v4 format. Admittedly, part of that may be attributable to the nascent player base's unfamiliarity with the flow of the maps, but I experienced longer-than-usual stretches without engagement across most of the maps. However, Skygarden, with its multiple levels of action and terrific convergence points, felt perfectly spaced.

Of course, in addition to solid gameplay and well-designed maps, the recipe for success in a hero-based game relies heavily on strong, colorful personalities for players to latch onto. While I couldn't get a good read on the personalities, I did gravitate toward a few characters based on their abilities. Nidhoggr is a Norwegian, metal-themed character with guitar-based melee attacks and specials, as well as a sliding ability that leaves a trail of flames behind him, while Cass features mid-range projectiles and metallic chicken legs that can be used for powerful scratches up close. However, the stealthy samurai Daemon and the Mexican machete wielder El Bastardo are my favorites, thanks to their ability to deal swift damage and escape encounters in efficient fashion.

With promising elements and a cast of larger-than-life personalities, I'm excited to see how I take to Bleeding Edge when I have more time with it, as well as how the community as a whole will embrace the latest title from Ninja Theory when it launches this month.
» **Brian Shea**



Ooblets

Creatures and comfort

No place is perfect, but the world of Oob may come pretty close. This idyllic landscape is where players live their simple lives in Ooblets – a simulation from developer Glumberland that lets you build a farm, explore your surroundings, and befriend whimsical creatures. If you want a peaceful retreat away from the typical pressures of gaming, then Oob is a place you can call home.

"We wanted to create a more idealized world where people were generally more decent to each other," says designer Ben Wasser. "There's still conflict and people being crappy to each other, but it's all limited. People settle differences through dance-offs instead of violence. There's a general level of understanding and empathy that most of the people of Oob extend to one another."

You begin the game with your customized character and one of the titular ooblets. They are small, cute magical beings that look like plant/animal hybrids, and they follow you around as you work the land and hunt for collectibles. A major facet of the gameplay revolves around growing, collecting, and training these creatures so they can compete against other ooblets in dance-offs. "Each ooblet has unique moves they can do in dance battles, and they'll interact in interesting ways with the moves of other ooblets." Wasser says. "There will be quite a bit of strategy to putting a good team together."

Though that process probably sounds familiar to Pokémon fans, Ooblets isn't necessarily a game about being the very best; it sits at the intersection of several other inspirations, including Harvest Moon and Animal Crossing. Finding furniture and clothing for customization is a key side activity, as is participating in quaint village life. But even then, the experience isn't all about rehashing old ideas.

"Once we started mushing all of these disparate gameplay concepts together, we quickly realized how much new territory we had to figure out for ourselves," Wasser says. "It'd be cool to fall in line with any of the incredible games we took inspiration from, but we've ended up forging a pretty unique path."

Ooblets has a distinct sense of humor and lighthearted tone that set it apart thanks to the strange sensibilities of Glumberland's two-person team (composed of Wasser and artist/programmer Rebecca Cordingley). The duo has been working on the project since 2016, but things now seem to be on-track for a 2020 release on Xbox One and the Epic Games Store. Waiting for launch may seem tough, but when it comes to laidback simulations, patience is a virtue.

» **Joe Juba**

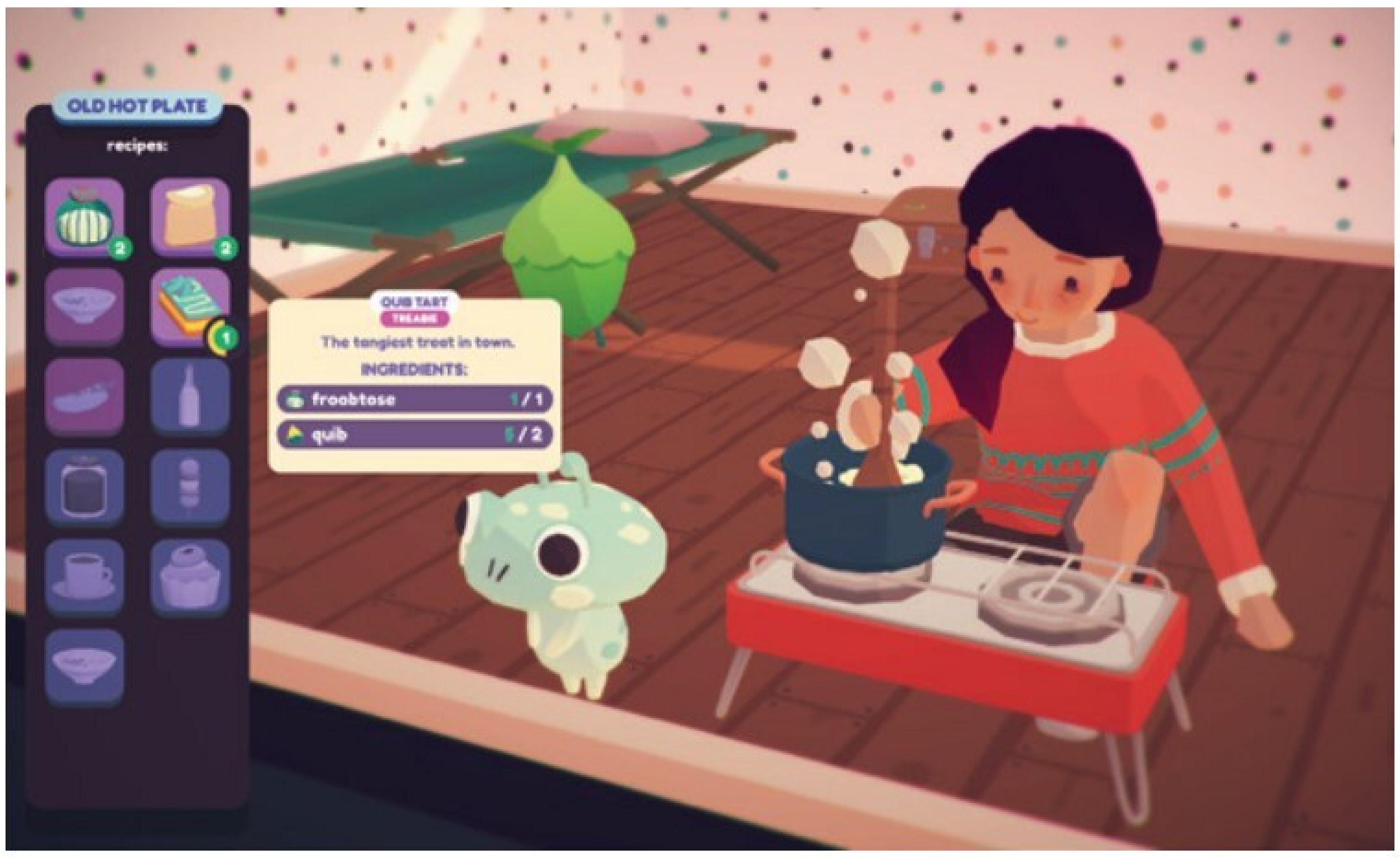
» **Platform**
Xbox One • PC

» **Style**
1-Player
Simulation

» **Publisher**
Glumberland

» **Developer**
Glumberland

» **Release**
2020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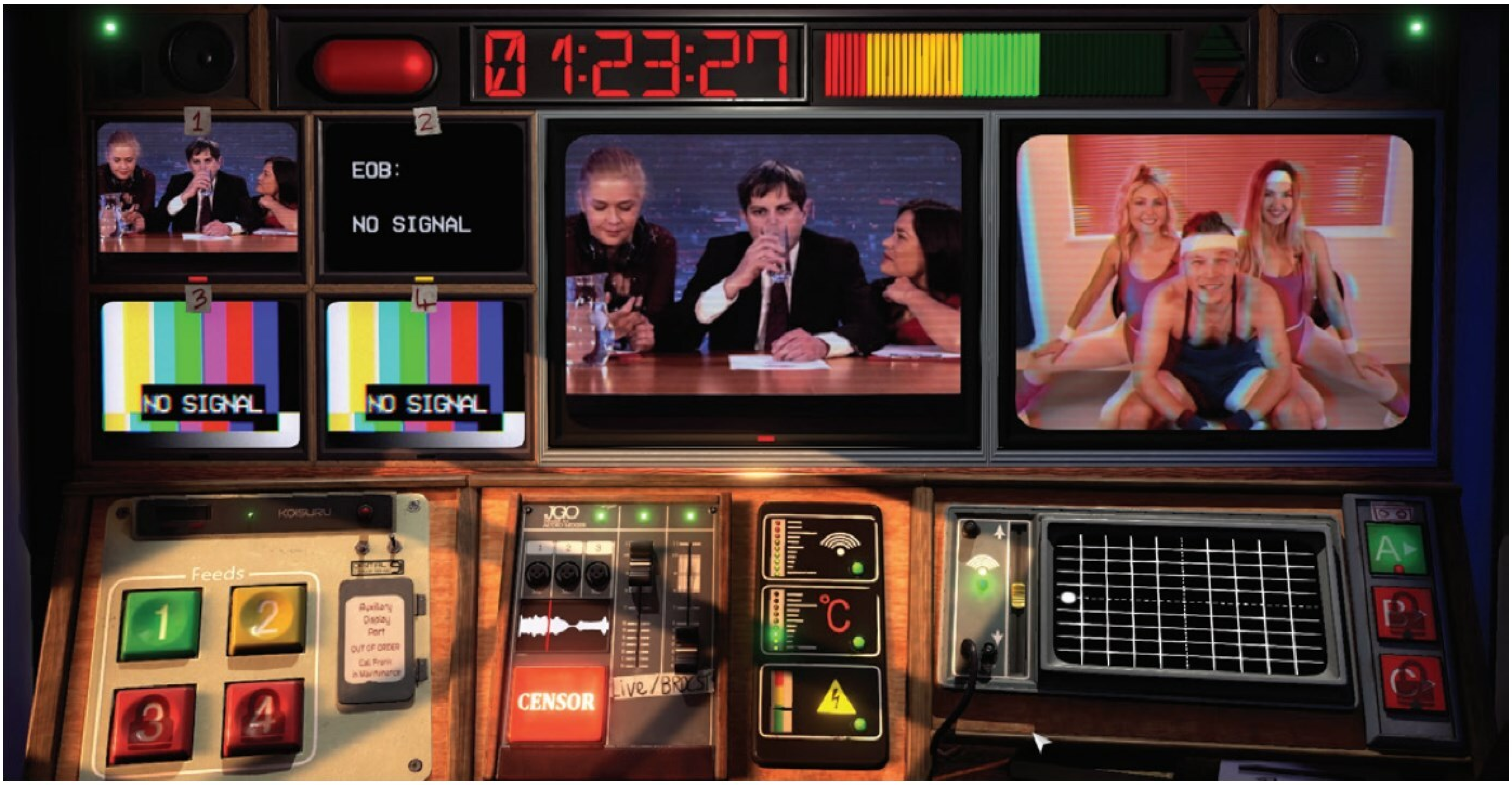
Not For Broadcast

Directing a dystopia, one silly show at a time



» **Platform**
PC

» **Style**
1-Player Simulation

» **Publisher**
TinyBuild Games

» **Developer**
NotGames

» **Release**
2020

One of the most stressful times I've had in our office was when I volunteered to help switch the cameras for *The Game Informer Show*. I watch a lot of TV, so I assumed I'd be a natural. Wrong. I was quickly overwhelmed, haphazardly switching between cameras with what can only be described at a frantic, seizure-inducing pace. If you watched that episode, sorry. And if you can't relate, don't worry – the British indie studio NotGames has cleverly taken that core experience and turned it into a remarkably engaging game. Not For Broadcast puts you in the director's chair at a news station as you choose what commercials to air, what language to censor, and, yes, which camera feed to prioritize. All the while, you have a front-row seat as society collapses around you.

NotGames is a small studio, and each member of the team brings experience in theater, video production, and acting. "I thought there must be a way to use our really weird specific skills to make an interesting game and to make something that's a bit different," says creative director Alex Paterson. The core idea was to somehow incorporate live-action footage with a gameplay layer that simulated video production. The news-program wrapper came shortly afterward, as the team realized that creating fictional news broadcasts was a great way to introduce world-building and narrative.

You start in the director's chair, with a view of several monitors and boards filled with various switches and knobs. It's a little overwhelming at first, but a tutorial quickly breaks down the important elements. Essentially, you watch various segments "live" through a bank of four monitors, and choose which ones to send out to audiences. Audiences are fickle, and they'll tune out if you don't focus on the people who are speaking or let swears leak through. You have to juggle other elements, such as what commercials to run or which graphics accompany breakout stories, as well as manage the signal strength in a simple minigame. It all happens in real time, and it's a lot to take in. "I think it's going to give people full-on nervous breakdowns," Paterson jokes. "Or that's the hope, at least."

The gameplay is interesting on its own, but NotGames is also telling an interesting tale. Over the course of each chapter, you realize that you're living in a nation in crisis. A new political party, Advance, has taken over, promising equality and justice for all citizens. Over time, it becomes clear that Advance has far more sinister intentions. "You start off censoring swear words in the first act, and in level five or six you start censoring titles of books that the party doesn't like," Paterson says.

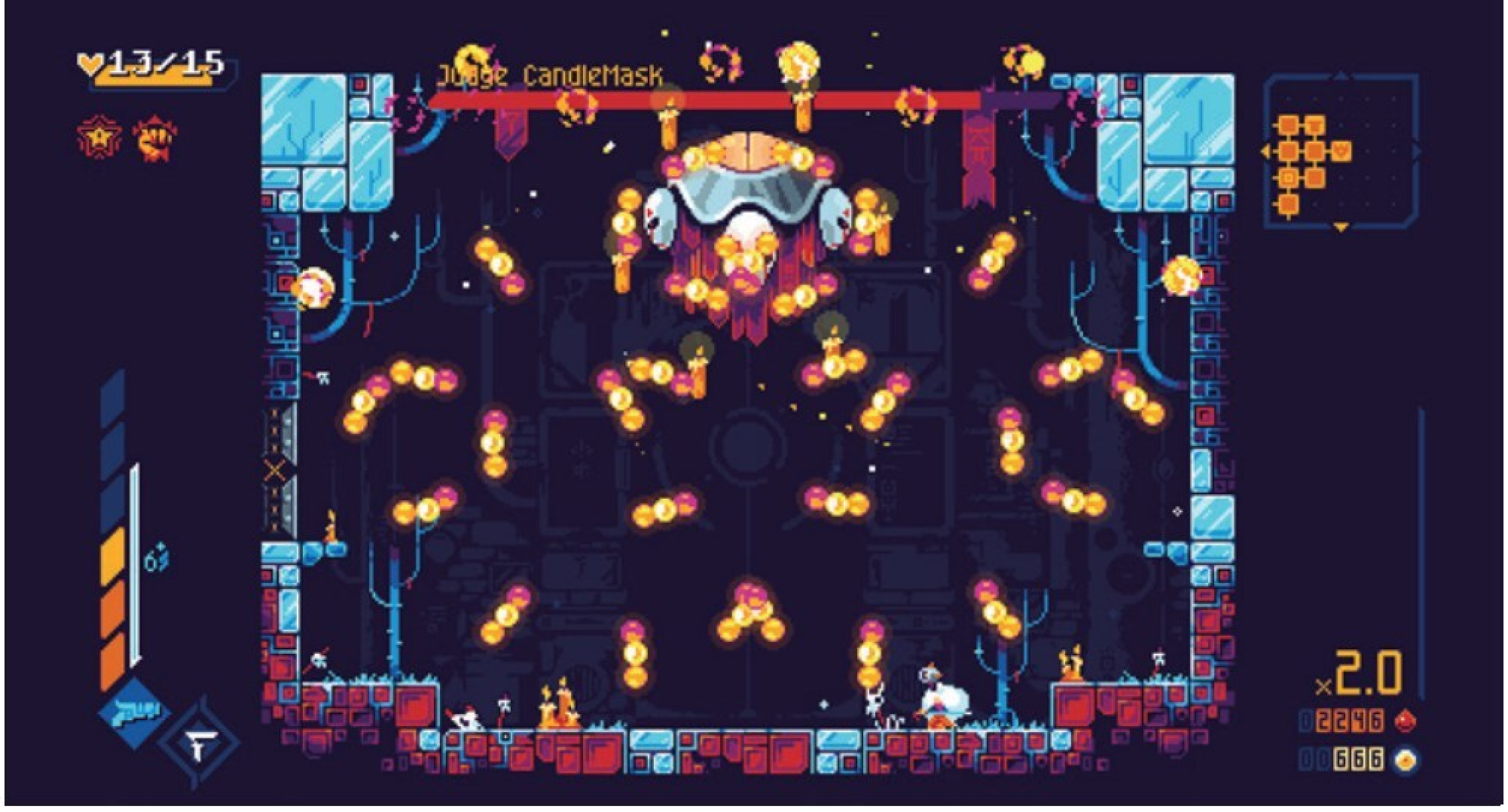
Between acts, the events featured in the broadcasts take on a more personal tone, as you make choices in text-based narrative sections. You must make some difficult decisions, such as whether to let your child participate in what appears to be a youth-recruiting effort for the party, or whether to loan your passport to someone in need. NotGames says the choices you make affect the footage that you see in the video sections, and that there are a variety of different endings and story threads.

Even though it tackles some serious issues, the overall tone of the early acts is generally silly. I was impressed with how much variety the designers have coaxed out of a relatively simple idea. For instance, in one section you're in charge of directing an awful community-theater performance – complete with a cringe-inducing "rap." You get extra points for timing your cuts with the music, such that it is. In another segment, you're in charge of a sports broadcast, where you must keep the camera on the action in a nonsensical sport. It's further complicated when streaking protesters invade the studio, and you need to keep the naked people out of the shots.

Even though it did dredge up some painful memories, I had a great time playing Not For Broadcast. It's still in Early Access, but NotGames has conceptualized a great idea and is now refining the execution. We'll know for sure if they stick the landing within the next year or so. » **Jeff Cork**

Scourgebringer

Fierce, frantic action



Sometimes you just want to sink your teeth into some white-knuckle action. Scourgebringer's early access release promises just that, and delivers room after room of procedurally generated, high-octane fights. The fast-paced roguelite focuses on mobility, quick reactions, and judicious skill timing. Over several hours of play, Flying Oak's game feels like a mash-up of Super Meat Boy or Celeste's precision 2D movement and the stylish action of a Devil May Cry.

Set in a stylized dystopian future, some of the color palette and pixel-graphic elements may call to mind the attractive Hyper Light Drifter. The readable visual style presents a dangerous sci-fi playscape, in which quiet moments erupt into heavy metal-infused battles every time I enter a new room.

I control Kyrha, a sleek and fast-moving hero who has entered the mysterious Scourgebringer, a massive structure that devastated humankind. In each run, I try to breach deeper into the structure, fighting room after room of persistent foes that chip away at my health. Fights are often all about managing the room by stunning certain big foes, using ranged blasts to take out others, all while desperately slashing foes closer at hand. Each map includes one or more mini-bosses, which in turn unlocks an even more powerful boss, beyond which lies a new collection of rooms and new enemies.

Along the way, I pick up money for merchant upgrades and powerful perks from altars of blood scattered around the maps – these upgrades disappear after death. Another scarcer resource fuels permanent bonuses that can be purchased at the skill tree between runs. Some of these upgrades change the entire dynamic of play, like a new combo meter that increases money gains for long strings without taking a hit.

Scourgebringer is adding new content as it moves through its early access period, but the bones of a very appealing roguelite loop are already in place. It doesn't waste much time on genuine exploration or secrets – this is all about hectic combat – but the controls are tight, the upgrades tantalizing, and the sense of momentum and speed addicting. » **Matt Miller**

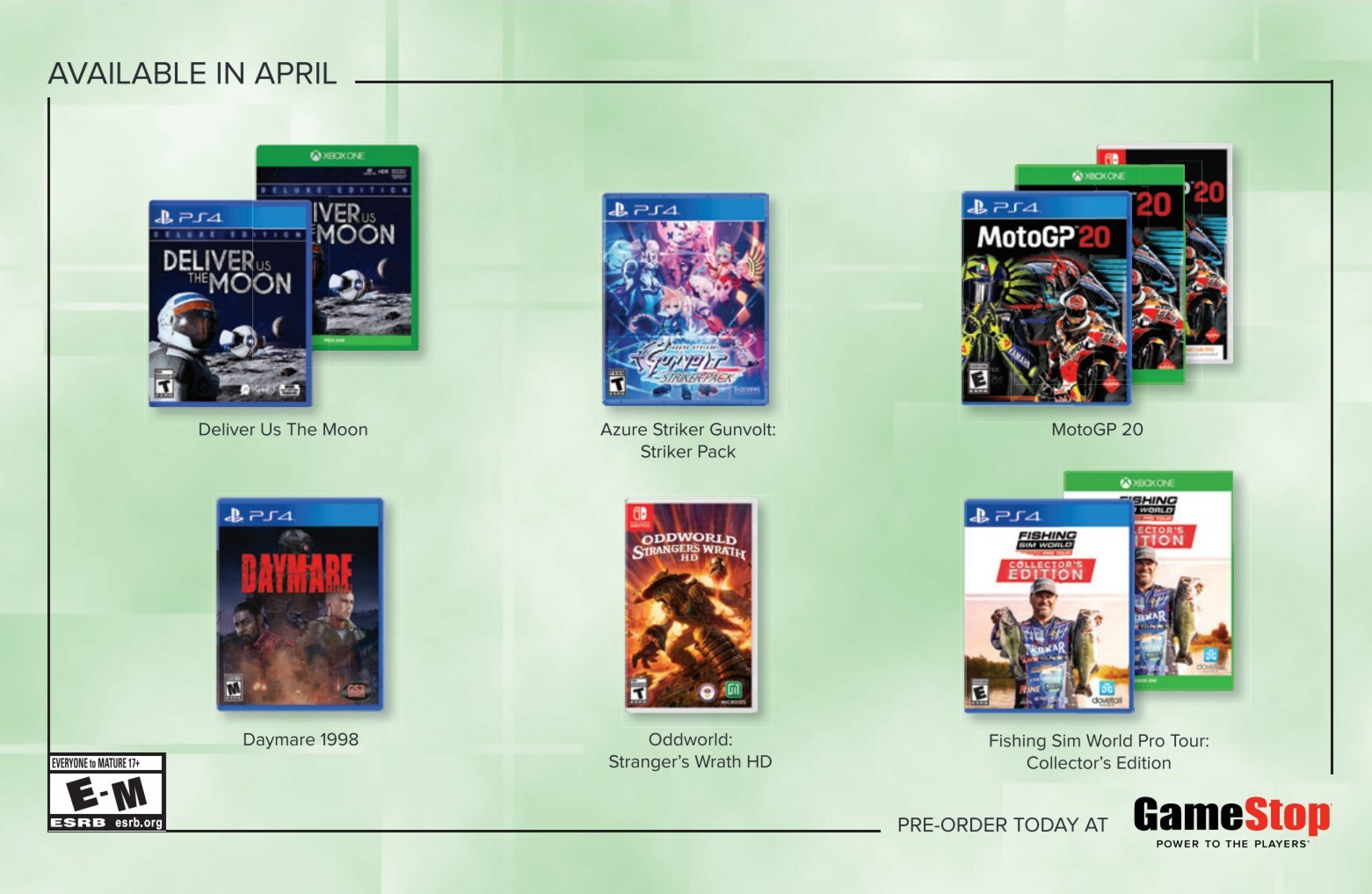
» **Platform**
PC • Consoles (TBA)

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Dear Villagers

» **Developer**
Flying Oak Games

» **Release**
2020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Phantasy Star Online 2

No longer a fantasy

» **Platform**
Xbox One, PC

» **Style**
1 to 4-Player MMORPG

» **Publisher**
Sega

» **Developer**
Online R&D

» **Release**
Spring

The iconic Phantasy Star series was a bright spot for the early RPG market and Sega's library. These days, it lives on mostly through the mobile and MMO spheres. The most recent online entry, Phantasy Star Online 2, launched close to eight years ago in Japan. With all that time passed, it looked like an unlikely candidate to ever come to our shores, despite Sega announcing localization in 2012. Then, last E3, Sega surprised fans by announcing the sci-fi MMORPG would reach North America, after all. I checked out a recent beta to see how the game, which launches later this spring on Xbox One and PC, plays after all these years.

Phantasy Star Online 2 starts with your standard MMO fare, letting you customize your character, which includes all the superficial elements, such as hair style and color. But your race and class provide your most defining features in terms of gameplay. There are four races: Humans make for a more all-around character, newmans are highly skilled in techniques (magic), CASTs are great at physical combat, and deumans excel offensively, but their defense is lacking. However, the classes are the most interesting, as they really determine your combat disciplines. Nine exist, including the basic classes from the original Phantasy Star Online, like the hunter and ranger, but new complex ones, such as the techter and gunner, have been added. I enjoy the variety, and immediately pick the summoner, thanks to the fact I have a cute pet following me around.

Playing the summoner, I feel more like a conductor, guiding the flow of battle from afar, selecting my pet's attacks and keeping an eye on everyone's HP levels and restoring them when necessary. Choosing the right pet for the situation is also vital; Some are better at ranged, single-target damage, while others are geared toward area-wide attacks. My friend chooses the bouncer, which is the complete opposite, being a very mobile and physical class. Think flashy and acrobatic moves. For instance, the bouncer has an attack that's just a rapid series of kicks, and its jetboots allow you to fly around the map, which is great for escaping precarious situations or just to get the lay of the land. The two classes complement each other well, and we do an array of missions that mostly required us to kill things and then face a big, bad boss. You can also do solo quests, or form up to four-player parties. Just be warned: You must be on the same server to play with friends, so make sure you coordinate ahead of time. There's also a system that matches you with players whose parties aren't full for the same quest.

The game has a variety of quest types, which can be confusing at first. Expedition quests allow you to explore at your leisure, recommended quests change daily, and there's a variety of sub-quests, from ones that require you to meet certain conditions to timed attack quests where you compete against other players for the fastest completion. Urgent quests also pop up at random; these are where you have your toughest bouts, but most likely bring the best rewards. You can also visit fun areas, such as the casino, cafe, or the huge market.

Phantasy Star Online 2 shows its age at times, with obtuse menus and repetitive backdrops, but it also has some cool combat and weapons (18 different types are available!). Nothing was overly complex, making it look like it could be a great introductory MMO for beginners. Only time will tell if Phantasy Star Online 2 has the staying power necessary for an MMORPG, but here's hoping. » **Kimberley Wallace**

Control: The Foundation

Expanding horizons

Our 2019 Game of the Year, Control, delivers the ultimate power fantasy. With an awe-inspiring suite of powers and weapons at your disposal, you step into the shoes of Jesse Faden, who explores the mind-warping Oldest House in search of answers about her family, her history, and an unexplainable force known as The Hiss. Now, developer Remedy Entertainment is giving players good reason to return to the role of Director through the first expansion: The Foundation.

The unpredictable Astral Plane is colliding with our reality and Jesse must descend to the caverns of the foundation to prevent The Oldest House from being completely consumed. With the Astral Plane rapidly leaking through a broken barrier, Jesse must find Helen Marshall, who may hold answers about how to stop the impending threat, and uncover information about the mysterious Board. To help Jesse in her mission, she gains access to a new ability called Shape, as well as an upgrade to her gun called Fracture, which allows her to manipulate the environment to her advantage.

To access the aforementioned content, players need to not only purchase the content, but also complete the campaign. However, every Control player regardless of those factors will receive a free update that improves the map, lets players reallocate ability points, adds new weapon and player mods, and delivers other improvements. In addition, the free update gives Jesse's Shield ability a new upgrade, which allows her shield to charge at enemies and knock them back.

With so many mysteries still lingering after the main campaign, The Foundation hopes to, in true Control fashion, deliver some answers while presenting even more questions. Regardless of how some of the logic breaks our brains, we're excited to once again delve into Remedy's enigmatic and enthralling universe. » **Brian Shea**

» **Platform**
PS4 • Xbox One
PC

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
505 Games

» **Developer**
Remedy
Entertainment

» **Release**
March 26

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reviews

EDITORS' CHOICE
ISSUE 324

77 Ori And The Will Of The Wisps

Developer Moon Studios has made a sequel that is every bit as challenging as it is heartfelt, shining brighter than its predecessor in both platforming and combat. Exploration and skill are rewarded well through the RPG systems, and the story delivers one hell of a payoff.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	5	Flawed. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	4	Bad. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.	3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.	2	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	1	Gross bugs.

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Bloodroots

A symphony of combos and casualties

8.5

PS4 • Switch • PC

» Concept
A hack 'n' slash action game that explores unique ground with combos based on speed and precision

» Graphics
Color is used in clever ways to highlight the emotion of certain gameplay and story sequences, like everything turning blood red. The enemy animations are also easy to read, allowing for quick response

» Sound
Western melodies provide a calming backdrop for the loud cracking of skulls

» Playability
The movements are pitch perfect. Performing combos is easy, but enemy formations push you to strategize your approach

» Entertainment
The story is fun to follow, but the real joy comes from playing levels over and over again to create the perfect combo run

» Replay Value
Moderate

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Paper Cult **Developer** Paper Cult **Release** June 21 **Rating** M

At the heart of Bloodroots rests a classic Western story of revenge: Work your way through an army of henchmen to reach the person who left you for dead. Your bloodlust has no bounds, allowing you to kill with anything you can grab, be it an axe or even a carrot.

Bloodroots is gory, violent, and manic, yet every action is about pinpoint precision. While it may sound like your typical hack 'n' slash game, it's all about making combo strings. If you are just a hair off in slaughtering a foe, you'll likely take an axe to the head, and more distressingly, lose the huge combo death streak you chained together. From this unique gameplay hook, Bloodroots delivers enthralling and frantic fun where you start runs and chop the same enemies to bits over and over again to create a perfect run in hopes of raising your rank on the leaderboards. For the older players out there, the runs are similar in flow to the Tony Hawk's Pro Skater games where you're striving for perfection. If you slip up just once, you're back to square one to try again.

Each level (or run) lasts roughly a minute, yet you continually have your eyes scanning for different ways to down your enemies. A level may seem brutally difficult at first, but once you learn the lay of the land and figure out how best to handle the threats, the difficulty dissolves into a dance of precise movements more than challenge.

A typical run unfolds with high levels of variance: You'll start by smashing someone over the head with a wooden oar, leap onto a barrel to roll over his three friends, use a sword to dart across a pit and stab someone in one motion, and then activate a flamethrower to light up a group of charging foes. Developer Paper Cult did a fantastic job of making each level feel distinct both in flow and the murder tools within it.

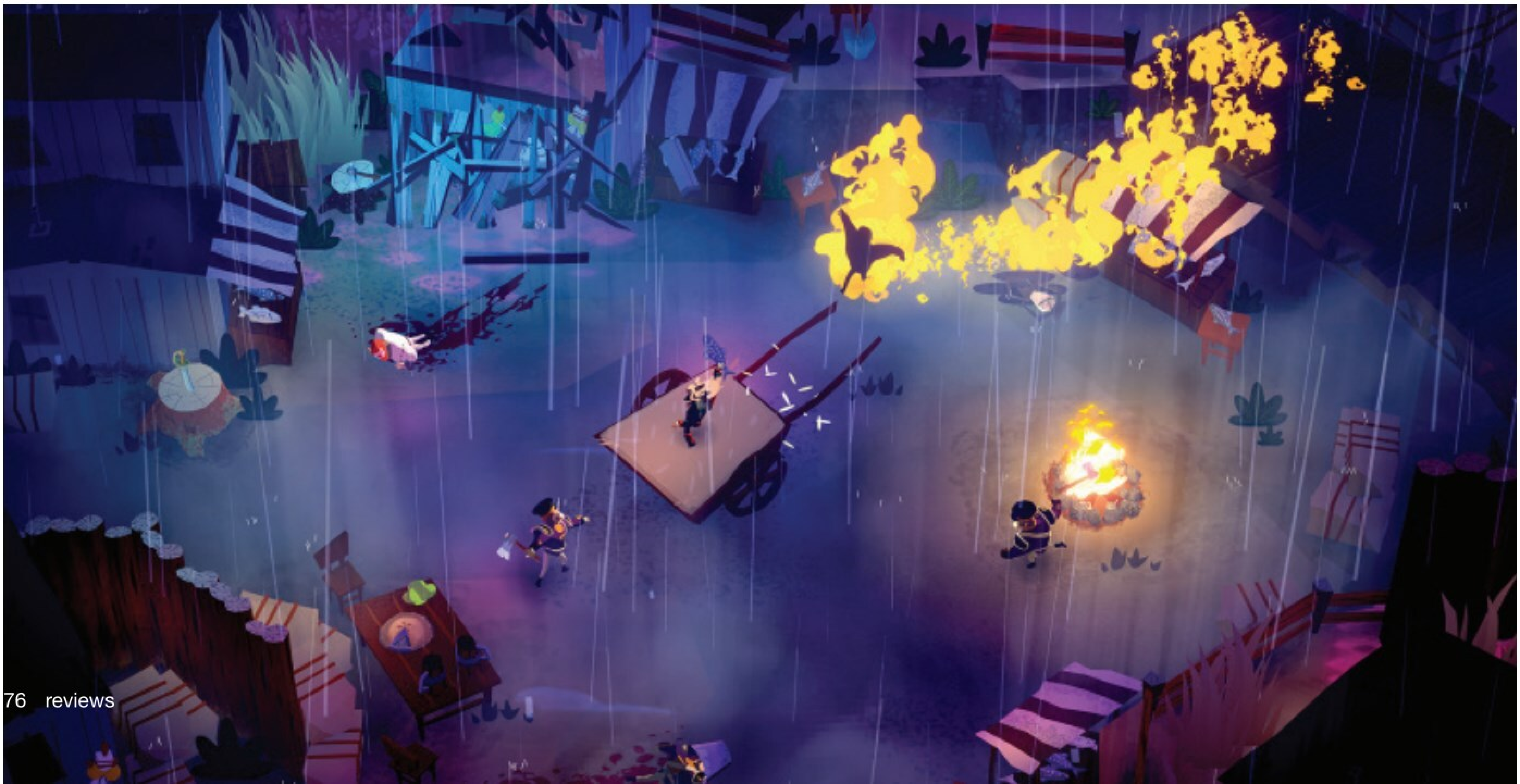
You suit up as the appropriately named Mister Wolf, a one-eyed killer who wears the skin of a wolf as a hat. The man at the top of his kill sheet is also outfitted in a wolf skin, making for a fascinating chase and finale. This story unfolds through comedic sequences backed by awesome classic Western melodies and amusing words penned by Nick Suttner (of Guacamelee 2 and Celeste fame). Paper Cult calls its vision of this lawless time period the "Weird West," and it fits with goofy characters and even stranger weapons (like a giant boot you can use to squish enemies, or a shield you can catch and throw like Captain America).

Even if you fall in love with a particular weapon, you can't rely on it; your tools break almost immediately, usually only giving you between one and three hits. You then need to move quickly to find something else. Your fist as a default attack does the trick, but the timing window for success is minuscule, making it good for nothing more than a last-ditch effort to fend someone off. Securing a new weapon is just as frantic as the combat, since you don't want your combo meter to drop. You can still finish the level without combos, but the real fun comes from seeing how big you can get the multiplier.

Bloodroots isn't a huge game, lasting just four or five hours on the first playthrough, but it delivers plenty of longevity and replayability. The reason to go through levels again is mostly for personal feats, but there are a couple of unlockable hats, each with unique abilities – like a handy dash – that change up the flow of play.

The game's huge stumble comes in the form of Paper Cult's decision to change up the flow of play with brief sequences that focus on platforming or hovering. The level where you are forced to hover in the air plays like Flappy Bird, with Mister Wolf bobbing up and down to avoid a gauntlet of spike traps. This section is incredibly challenging and overstays its welcome, adding unnecessary frustration to an otherwise carefully constructed action game.

Outside of yelling at my TV a few times, I had a blast with Bloodroots. Each level delivers edge-of-your-seat excitement, which, while leading to plenty of runs being restarted, concludes with the satisfaction of revenge being delivered through a bloody combo ballet. **» Andrew Reiner**



Ori And The Will Of The Wisps

Excellent platforming evolution

EDITORS' CHOICE
ISSUE 324

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Xbox Game Studios **Developer** Moon Studios **Release** March 11 **Rating** E

Ori and the Will of the Wisps strikes the perfect balance between life and death, filling your heart with joy one second and then crushing it the next. Developer Moon Studios plays the role of puppeteer, tugging at the player's emotions whenever possible, both through a beautifully penned story that sees Ori racing to rescue a friend, and also nail-biting gameplay that demands precision and patience every step of the way. Will of the Wisps is more carefully designed than Ori and the Blind Forest, dazzling with the basics and upping the tension frequently through explosive setpiece moments.

This is not a game for the faint of heart – it's as challenging as it is clever. Even if you figure out a jumping pattern required to solve an environmental puzzle, you need to be able to make those leaps, which are often ridiculously hard. Ori needs to jump, double jump, roll, glide, and latch onto objects – and sometimes he does all of those things in a single elaborate maneuver.

Moon Studios doesn't back down from the original's difficulty, and though you may die over and over, Will of the Wisps is a more approachable experience thanks to a new checkpoint system. Instead of sacrificing valuable energy to create save points, you now have more forgiving checkpoints that are activated when you reach certain spots. The checkpoints are everywhere, and make sense for each challenge area. If you reach a ledge free of threats, it's likely a checkpoint.

The only area where Ori doesn't save progress is during Ori's escapes. Yes, these chaotic sequences are back; Ori must dash over tumbling terrain as an avalanche roars toward her, and dart in and out of sand to stay ahead of a tunneling worm. These tests of skill require split-second thinking and near perfect movement. They make you hold your breath and exhale profanity, but are easy to read in terms of navigation and are not nearly as tough as they were in the Blind Forest. They're still difficult, but you should be able to get through them after a few tries.

While the story focuses on Ori trying to locate a little owlet named Ku, the game is mostly a pursuit of power. The opening section is mostly guided, but then it opens up and lets players figure things out on their own. A journey into the watery Luma Pools to the east may lead to little progress being made until you first gain a power from the north, yet you don't know it's there or what it may be. You just need to keep exploring, and pay attention to the environments for areas that you think you can eventually reach. Using Ori's moveset to navigate these spaces is a blast – I never tired of it. The map does a fantastic job of tracking progress and visually showing you areas that haven't fully cleared out yet.

The entire forest delivers the sensation that you are exploring one giant, sprawling dungeon, even though each area is visually distinct. The powers Ori unearths are varied and fun to use, including a surprising number of abilities dedicated to combat, which plays a larger role across the entire game, and is a welcome addition.

The arsenal of attacks players find allow Ori to be up close and personal with energy sword strikes and an aura that deals damage, or to be more elusive and use ranged attacks like a boomerang or sentry. The abilities can be switched with ease on the fly through a wheel and are all powerful in their own right.

Players can also invest spirit shards into enhancing these attacks, as well as Ori's base statistics, like taking 25 percent less damage or being able to shoot projectiles faster. The shards can also enhance abilities, such as a jump doubling as a ram attack, and the Spirit Arc splitting into three shots. All of these light RPG systems are awesome, as they just push players to explore more and battle every enemy, as most drop shards.

They also help with bosses, towering creatures that have plenty of health and are incredibly aggressive. These fights deliver frantic fun and push players to wait for openings to attack.

The story is fantastic, the world is breathtaking, and all of that pales in comparison to the wonderfully made gameplay that soars both as a platforming and combat game. Moon Studios has outdone itself with Will of the Wisps, making an experience that doesn't have any lulls, makes the player feel clever, and just keeps getting better as it goes. » **Andrew Reiner**

9.5

Xbox One • PC

» Concept
Brimming with heart and challenge, Will of the Wisps is a brilliantly made Metroid-inspired experience that excels in combat, story, and platforming

» Graphics
Simply stunning. The forest is lushly detailed and filled with swaying trees. The animations for Ori and the many creatures are also top-notch

» Sound
The soundtrack is magical and foreboding. No particular melody leaps out, yet each tune sits appropriately in the background to elevate the tension or drama

» Playability
Environmental exploration is rarely this good. Most areas are filled with platforming puzzles and challenging combat that demand pinpoint precision

» Entertainment
Better than its predecessor and a little longer, Will of the Wisps pounds out excitement at every turn

» Replay Value
Moderately High

Nioh 2

Meticulous masochism

8.5

PS4

Style 1-Player Action (3-Player Online) **Publisher** Sony Interactive Entertainment, Koei Tecmo **Developer** Team Ninja **Release** March 13 **Rating** M

» Concept
Embrace the demon inside you as you wreak havoc across a fictionalized Sengoku-era Japan

» Graphics
Environment variety is seriously lacking, with most of the game falling into mundane browns and grays in castles, villages, and caves. Moments when you're using impressive abilities look beautiful, though

» Sound
While it's pleasing to hear your rifle hiss before letting loose, most of the audio is completely standard and forgettable

» Playability
With new mechanics layered on familiar gameplay, you must master additional maneuvers to survive. This is an extremely challenging and punishing game that should be approached with some expectation of failure

» Entertainment
Offering a host of bosses to battle, challenges to overcome, and massive customization opportunities, Nioh 2 is a tantalizing treat for those with a thirst for serious and sometimes frustrating adversity

» Replay Value
High

Nioh 2 is an incredibly punishing game where even the lowliest enemy can kill you in mere moments. Through perseverance, precise combat, and careful preparation, you can emerge from a world filled with duplicitous demons and humans. If you love systems and mechanics, the cup is overflowing here as you master elements from guard-breaking to ninja items. But be warned, this teacher is not a kind or cuddly sensei. Nioh 2 can break your spirit through constant, grueling punishments that push you well beyond your limits, but perhaps you have the spirit of the samurai to soldier on and taste victory even when all seems lost.

Deep and highly customizable combat is the shining jewel that carries Nioh 2. You train in a weapon (or weapons) of your choice, determine where to place your stat and ability points for the maximum benefit, and perfect the timing of blows. Nioh 2 introduces new features that add even more complexity to those systems, including the dark realm and yokai abilities. Burst counters are my favorite addition; through masterful timing, you can wait for an opponent to flash red before they unleash a deadly attack, and then counter that move and destroy your assailant. Early in the game, you dread those red-flashing lethal strikes coming your way. By the end, you've mastered the technique and you can't wait for enemies to try and hit you with a big one, as it may be one of your best chances to get in some serious damage. This all makes burst countering a fun way to add variety and prevent you from relying too heavily on your old standbys.

Your gameplay time is occupied by tons of main missions and rewarding side missions that provide skill points, gestures, and extra gear. I had the most fun with optional sub-missions that amount to fast-paced boss rushes, while main missions have a wide range of experiences from passable to maddening. As in the original, you can also take on more difficult missions for bigger hauls and get help from up to two other players. Teaming up with friends is easy, and it makes incredibly difficult encounters much easier, so it's a great lifeline if you are stuck.

While some games foster a sense of triumph by challenging players, Nioh 2 has a penchant for extracting the ultimate price in sadistic ways. Even the lowliest peasant can kill you with a stray slice of a sword, and many of the levels set up gruesome breadcrumb traps of death that force you to inch forward examining every possible scenario. Rush the first ranged enemy? It has two others covering it from afar, and you should have spotted them and used your rifle first – but there's also a yokai patrol that can see you if you peek at them, so make sure to take that out first. This type of thing is common, and while it can be satisfying to check every corner before looting an item in the early stages, later on it becomes just a tiresome chore. You don't have to wonder if something is hiding behind the wall or if something is going to fall from the ceiling; you just know it is, and it's more fatiguing than inspiring.

Now, that said, you're still getting treated to a smorgasbord of fun boss battles and awesome customization. Refining your weapons into murder machines, gaining levels and skills, and collecting buckets of loot to complete gear sets is satisfying. Boss battles take a quantity-over-quality approach, with dozens of encounters and erratic difficulty. Some are extremely tough, while others are pushovers that leave you scratching your head waiting for a phase two that never comes. Despite the inconsistency, I enjoyed many memorable fights among the deluge of "This guy is a samurai with a guardian spirit you probably won't remember in 20 minutes" encounters.

Nioh 2, like Nioh before it, is an unrelenting and extremely punishing ride that has you weighing every resource available. Despite some flaws, this experience carves you from an unrefined, button-mashing pustule into a precision-striking samurai.

» Daniel Tack

7th Sector

A puzzler with a spark

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Sometimes You **Developer** Sergey Noskov **Release** February 5 **Rating** T

A television set comes to life, static filling its screen. Within the noise, you can barely make out a humanoid figure. Moving the analog stick makes this faint specter move, but it's trapped in this small box with no clear objective or interaction point. This is 7th Sector's first puzzle, and it's a bit of a doozy, at first making me think my game may have glitched out. Developer Sergey Noskov gives you no indication of what you need to do in this moment. Almost every puzzle is free of guidance, which can lead to moments of frustration. But more often, it leads to the satisfaction of having the insight to figure something out on your own. This is a game that lives and dies by its obtuse design.

After the first puzzle is solved in a fairly unconventional way, 7th Sector only gets stranger. You don't take control of the human you saw or anything even close to a typical game character. You become an ordinary electrical spark. It can't emote or do anything other than travel along cables to devices that it can bring to life. As the spark moves through the world, you see a dystopian cyberpunk story unfold in the background, catching glimpses of robots warring with humans and even more distressing and fascinating things. This is a clever way of telling a story, but it doesn't deliver much excitement or build up until the final act, which concludes with a great reveal in the vein of *The Matrix*.

The spark of note is used effectively for clever navigational puzzles along a side-scrolling setting that push you to figure out how to reach other cables or to open doors. Just when it seems like the puzzles mostly revolve around recognizing patterns or using the correct timing, Noskov (who is a one-person development team) throws math at you. You are asked to solve fairly simple math problems, like figuring out which group of numbers adds up to 220 (a specific number used often in 7th Sector), but you are also presented with division and multiplication tests. If a math problem is too hard, you can randomly click numbers to brute-force the solution without negative consequences (as I did once). That said, by the time the credits rolled, I looked back on the math and found it connected nicely to what Noskov is trying to reveal in the story. It's quite clever.

Just as I was getting used to controlling my emotionless blue spark, the gameplay changes completely to power up a robotic ball, which you then control. Outside of more math, the puzzles become entirely different at this point, yet just as fun and directionless, only now involving more physics-based actions. Just when it seemed I had the ball gameplay down, the spark jumps into another robot. This one is much bigger and has guns, which leads to some combat amidst even more puzzles. The combat isn't great, and is easily the weakest part of the game, but it is used sparingly and is only mildly frustrating.

The spark moves on to other entities as well, but it wouldn't be fair of me to spoil where this adventure goes next. In the three to four hours it took to complete 7th Sector, I was eager to see what would happen next, all while cursing math and not knowing what I needed to do. I got stumped a few times, but the puzzle spaces are small and most of their interactive elements are easy to spot.

I'm a big fan of Playdead's Limbo and Inside, and 7th Sector scratches the same kind of itch, but in much stranger and mathematical ways. It's a journey worth taking, but just know you're often left directionless and perhaps in need of a calculator.

» **Andrew Reiner**

7.5

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» **Concept**
A side-scrolling adventure that delivers little direction in its puzzles, yet makes you feel great when solving them

» **Graphics**
The dark cyberpunk setting sells the mood, and the backdrops effectively tell the story

» **Sound**
The score is appropriately empty and eerie. Sound is sometimes used to help guide you through puzzles

» **Playability**
Outside of having to solve math problems, many of the puzzles are clever one-offs, meaning you almost always have new challenges to look forward to

» **Entertainment**
The story delivers a nice payoff at the end, making the difficult puzzles worth the time

» **Replay Value**
Moderately low

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Warcraft III: Reforged

An incredible game, a disappointing remaster

6

Style 1-Player Strategy (12-Player Online) **Publisher** Blizzard Entertainment **Developer** Blizzard Entertainment **Release** January 28 **Rating** T

PC

» Concept
Explore one of history's best real-time strategy games with new assets and glitches

» Graphics
While the revamped visuals are great on peasants and buildings, some characters are jarring diversions from their source material

» Sound
Iconic barks, a rambunctious score, and the clashing of steel form a powerful backdrop to the action

» Playability
Easy to hop in and play, with varying difficulty modes available for those who just want to experience the Warcraft saga and story

» Entertainment
Warcraft III was a great game, but I struggle to find a reason to return to it in this form. Reforged has a laundry list of bugs, lack of polish, multiplayer options markedly amiss from the original offering, and uninspiring new assets

» Replay Value
High

Warcraft III is one of the best games of all time; Blizzard's genre-transcending work shaped both the future of the company and the greater industry landscape forever. On the other hand, Warcraft III: Reforged is an uninspired remaster that lacks Blizzard's signature polish and panache. Almost every aspect of this remaster drags the source down instead of lifting it up.

Reforged presents the player with the entirety of the original Reign of Chaos game and The Frozen Throne expansion, with optional modern assets in lieu of the blocky, pronounced models from decades ago and a smattering of miniscule changes. For example, Blizzard added World of Warcraft Stratholme bosses in the famous Culling level, but the tweaks essentially end there – begging one to wonder why the game is worthy of the Reforged moniker at all, instead of a simple "remastered."

Warcraft III sets the stage for everything in the gigantic Warcraft universe that we know today, a sprawling saga featuring Arthas, Jaina, Sylvanas, and countless other characters. The campaign is an epic undertaking, with a mixture of traditional RTS missions, base-building, small-scale RPG-style escapades, and horde-mode holdouts. However, the journey in Reforged is marred by numerous bugs and aberrations. I saw strange lighting quirks, stuttering, missing portraits, and even a glitch that caused one of my undead levels to instantly fail when I started it up. Some of these errors could be dismissed individually, but the bucket of bugs gradually fills up and overflows, tainting the entire game.

Some of the new assets make the game look better than its original incarnation (especially in terms of buildings and lower tier units like citizens, wildlife, and monsters), but others are jarring and uncomfortable. Errant animations and generic fantasy archetypes take away from the zest of the original designs. Some orc portraits lack unit identity; Mannoroth's head looks bizarre on his massive frame, and even little goblin tinkerers appear unusually out of place. What the new assets gain significantly in presentation power, they are tinged with a kind of universal fantasy sterility that sucks the flavor out of them. Despite this, the campaign is still an experience I'd recommend, whether you opt to use the new or old assets, especially for those looking for a historical and still-relevant romp through an immersive universe.

While not every remaster adds new features, they rarely remove elements from the original. Reforged does, though. On release, multiplayer features like ladder and social functionality are completely absent from this new incarnation. The core multiplayer game is still solid as ever, and custom maps that have gone on to define entire subgenres of gaming are still available and awesome to play.

I enjoy revisiting maps that I haven't seen in nearly two decades, including Dota clones, tower defenses, survival maps, Mario Party-style games, and castle fight (a subgenre that would go on to inspire the modern deluge of Clash Royale-like games). Warcraft III's custom map scene was a hotbed of creativity and color, and it's refreshing to see that many of those games are still infinitely playable today. These classics are great, but map-makers and modders have not yet blazed any new and exciting trails in Reforged – possibly because Blizzard technically owns any player-made creations this time around. That said, revisiting these old game-design stomping grounds is an immensely enjoyable diversion, and by far the best part of my Reforged playtime.

Warcraft III: Reforged teaches the harsh lesson that sacred, legendary titles need to be revisited with only the utmost care. Core elements that made the original an absolute Earth-shaker still remain, but as a remaster meant to enhance the original experience, Reforged is greatly flawed.

» **Daniel Tack**

Legends Of Runeterra

Colorful card combat

Style 2-Player Online Strategy **Publisher** Riot Games **Developer** Riot Games **Release** January 24 **Rating** T

The free-to-play digital card game space is a constant battle for discovery and long-term viability. With Legends of Runeterra, Riot is entering a battlefield filled with numerous competitors. An amalgamation of parts constructed from bits of Magic: The Gathering, Hearthstone, Gwent, and even Valve's Artifact, it's a carefully crafted recipe bursting with League of Legends flavor and personality.

If you already love League of Legends, you can find a lot to enjoy here, but that familiarity is not a requirement. Champions from League form the backbone of many decks, and Riot has done an excellent job translating the spirit of the characters into card form. The hyper-annoying Teemo, long-known for hit-and-run tactics and mushroom traps in League of Legends, becomes a stealthy and equally annoying treasure in Runeterra, infesting your opponent's deck with a deadly stream of poisonous mushrooms that function as a lethal clock. Heimerdinger's turret-spawning antics can take a blank board to one overflowing with dangerous machinations. Tryndamere commands the late-game with overflowing strength and barbarian tenacity. Ashe's signature frozen arrows turn even the mightiest army into a frigid, meek menagerie. Like their League of Legends counterparts, playing with the different champions often changes the rules, and you really feel like you're playing a different game each time as you build around their strengths. This lends a good deal of variety to the same base goal of reducing a life total to zero.

These champions all feature level-up requirements that you can build a deck around, which makes it easy to identify strategies to cobble together archetypes. For instance, Teemo starts off by popping five mushrooms into the opponent's deck if he hits them. But after 15 mushrooms have been placed, Teemo levels up, causing his taps to double the mushrooms in the opponent's deck on a successful connect – making a connection a dire, game-winning pop instead of a couple of shroomies you can ignore.

Outside of the cool quips and animations that occur during these champion level-ups, the core of the strategy lies in two major elements: synergy and timing. You're encouraged to build decks that use up to two factions, based on locations from the League of Legends universe. You can easily build a focused deck from one faction that does something well, but grabbing cards from a second faction can cover your blind spots and make something more effective. If you're making a Frejlord deck focused on huge followers and buffs, you may want to add some Shadow Isles cards to give you some removal potential to take out enemy threats.

On the surface, one could mistake things as a simple game of "playing cards on curve" as your mana goes up, but the element of passing rounds and actions makes timing a much more interesting proposition. When you do something can be more important than the action itself. If it's your turn to attack, do you do it right away when the opponent hasn't had time to put something large on the board to block, or do you wait until after you've played something huge of your own? If you try playing a big, game-ending beastie at the start of your turn, you could be walking right into an opponent's trap; maybe they can blow up the entire battlefield with a spell and cause you to lose everything. On the other hand, if you attack right away, you could be leaving a ton of extra damage on the table, making your turn far less effective. Knowing and guessing what your opponent might play at any given time is a huge factor that can make or break games. Chains of spells, actions, and reactions to any given situation form extremely satisfying interactions that let you flex your brain instead of simply dumping something new on the board each round.

Currently, your activities are rather limited, whether you're climbing the ladder in standard matches or engaging with the draft format, Expedition. Expedition lacks the variety other card games offer, as it essentially has you building around archetypes from small, constructed card pods instead of having a wide field to select from. However, this mode is incredibly accessible for novices and newcomers. Standard matches are fast and fun, but you end up facing off against many of the same archetypes over and over. A.I. matches are available, but there's no real single-player content to speak of or any engagement outside of the two core offerings.

This is a free-to-play game, with a catch. In a strange twist, how many cards players can purchase per week is limited (in addition to your standard free progression). That means it's likely no one has every card, and the best strategies have not yet been codified. This keeps the metagame fresh and full of experimentation, since you have to use what you have without cobbling together all the best decks immediately. However, it remains to be seen whether this approach will give new arrivals an inherent disadvantage in the future.

Legends of Runeterra has a lot to offer as it enters the digital card game ring. Exploring the League of Legends universe in card form is enjoyable and addictive, and slicing an opponent down with a Fiora flourish or a Thresh-hooked hero is a blast. » **Daniel Tack**

8.25

PC

» **Concept**
Take on an opponent in fast-paced card matches with characters from the League of Legends universe

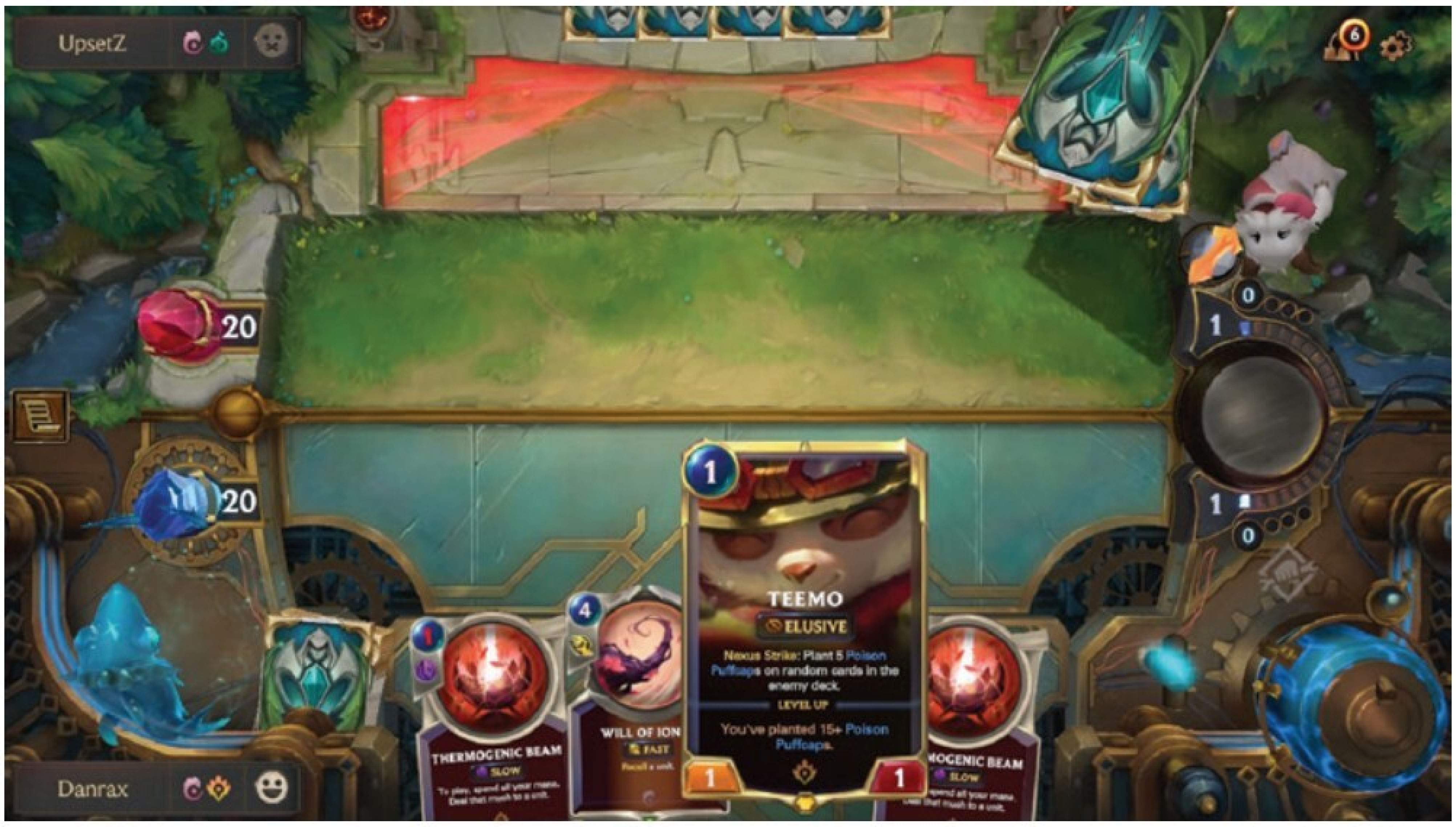
» **Graphics**
Card art is great, and the level-up transitions and animations give a little extra oomph to a game that generally boils down to numbers

» **Sound**
Voices add an essential bit of flavor to major and minor characters, with sturdy (if repetitive) sounds and score

» **Playability**
Those who already are immersed in the world of digital card games will be familiar with most mechanics immediately

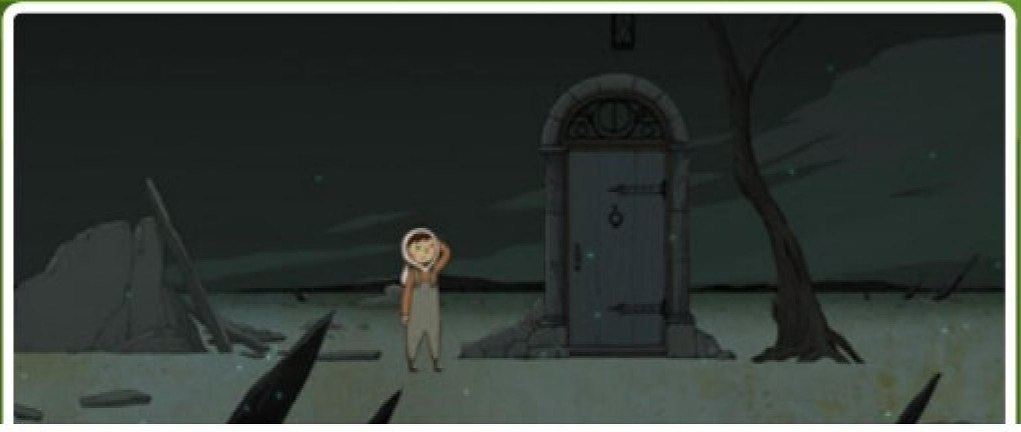
» **Entertainment**
Cool animations, League of Legends flavor, and smart gameplay elements that reward strategy make Legends of Runeterra a solid addition to the genre

» **Replay Value**
High



Nexus Strike: Plant 5 Poison Puffcaps on random cards in the enemy deck.

You've planted 15+ Poison Puffcaps.



7.5 Luna: The Shadow Dust

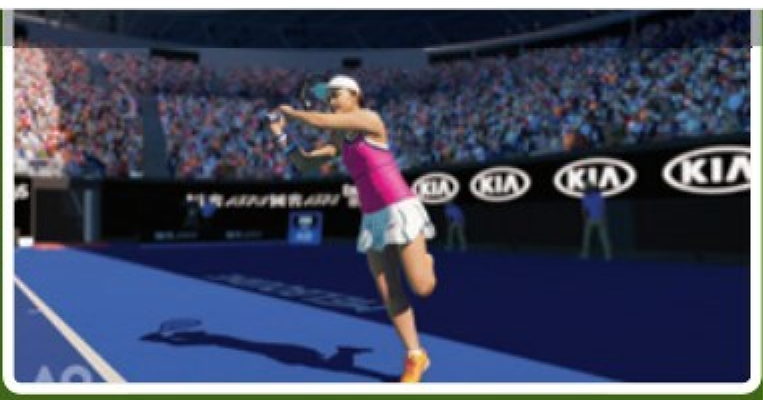
Platform PC **Release** February 13 **Rating** E10+

Luna looks like a picture book come to life, and its world is so warm and inviting that I want to cozy up under it like a warm blanket. Unfortunately, some of Luna's point-and-click puzzles are so prickly they sour much of the experience. ***– Ben Reeves***

6.5 AO Tennis 2

Platform PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • PC
Release February 11 **Rating** E

Despite the strength of its career mode, it's too bad AO Tennis 2's gameplay isn't more dependable, because the genre has needed a new light for several generations. However, this game can't muster the consistency needed to be a credible threat. ***– Matthew Kato***



6.25 The Dark Crystal: Age Of Resistance Tactics

Platform PS4 • Xbox One • Switch • PC • Mac **Release** February 4 **Rating** E10+

A pale imitation of its source material, Age of Resistance Tactics draws on inspirations like Final Fantasy Tactics for its gameplay model, but misses the mark in the ways that matter. Without tactical sophistication or a meaningful engagement with the lore, I can't recommend joining this resistance. ***– Matt Miller***

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Indivisible	7	320
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Need for Speed Heat	8	321
Neo Cab	8	320
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SaGa Scarlet Grace: Ambitions	7.75	323
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Mosaic	8.75	322
Neo Cab	8	320
SaGa Scarlet Grace: Ambitions	7.75	323
Sayonara Wild Hearts	7	320

6 Kunai

Platform Switch • PC **Release** February 6 **Rating** E10+

You use the titular kunai to attach ropes to most surfaces; this lets you easily swing, climb, and launch yourself through enemy-infested areas. Though this is a fun twist on navigation, it isn't enough to carry the whole experience. In exploration, combat, and boss fights, Kunai falls short. – **Joe Juba**

7 Tony Stewart's Sprint Car Racing

Platform PS4 • Xbox One • PC
Release February 14 (PS4, Xbox One), February 21 (PC) **Rating** E

Dirt racing may be a sort of minor league to the big-time stock cars, but this game – while limited in some areas – taps into its own enjoyable racing rhythm and buzz. – **Matthew Kato**

7.5 Coffee Talk

Platform PS4 • Xbox One • PC • Mac
Release January 29 **Rating** T

At times, Coffee Talk struggles with just how far it wants to explore certain topics, sometimes only giving a cursory look at the issue at hand. I was still entertained during my playthrough, and I genuinely cared about the characters and their journeys – even if those journeys don't take them to unexpected places. – **Kimberley Wallace**

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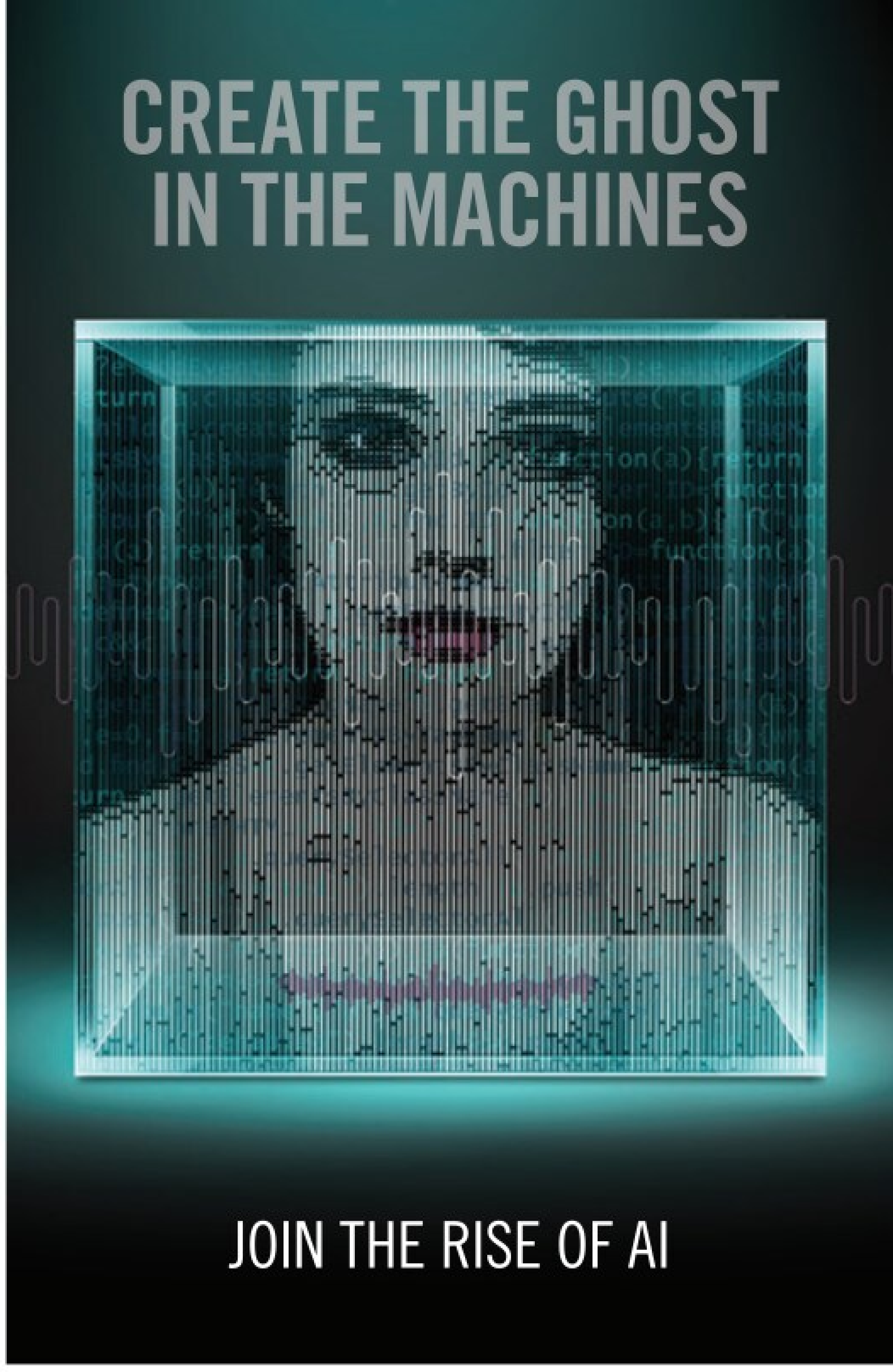

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Scare Quotes: Resident Evil Or Fast And Furious?

Writing believable dialogue is hard. But dialogue doesn't need to be believable if it's so bad it's good. We searched high and low for another entertainment property that could match Resident Evil's cornball one-liners to produce this quippy quiz. So ask yourself this, hotshot: Are these quotes from a Resident Evil game or a Fast and Furious film?

by Ben Reeves

1. "I'm gonna kick your teeth so far down your throat you're gonna stick a toothbrush right up your a** to brush 'em."
A. Resident Evil
B. Fast and Furious

2. "I'm sure you boys didn't just tag along so we could sing 'Kumbaya' together at some Boy Scout bonfire. Then again, maybe you did."
A. Resident Evil
B. Fast and Furious

3. "You're like the Justin Timberlake of Japan."
A. Resident Evil
B. Fast and Furious

4. "You just earned yourself a dance with the devil, boy."
A. Resident Evil
B. Fast and Furious

5. "It's a weapon. It's really powerful, especially against living things."
A. Resident Evil
B. Fast and Furious

6. "You risk life and limb to save the free world, and what does it give you? Jello and a bad '70s TV show."
A. Resident Evil
B. Fast and Furious

7. "I'm going to find out what caused [redacted's] death. It looks like he was killed by a crow or something!"
A. Resident Evil
B. Fast and Furious

8. "Maybe you have nine lives, but it doesn't matter now. I've sent my right hand to dispose of you."
"Your right hand comes off?"
A. Resident Evil
B. Fast and Furious

9. "Thing about street fights – the street always wins."
A. Resident Evil
B. Fast and Furious

10. "Aww, I hate snow!"
"Snow hates you!"
A. Resident Evil
B. Fast and Furious

Answers: 1: B. The Fate of the Furious, 2: A. Resident Evil 4, 3: B. The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift, 4: B. Fast and Furious 7, 5: A. Resident Evil, 6: B. Fast and Furious 7, 7: A. Resident Evil, 8: A. Resident Evil 4, 9: B. Fast and Furious 7, 10: A. Resident Evil: Revelations

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